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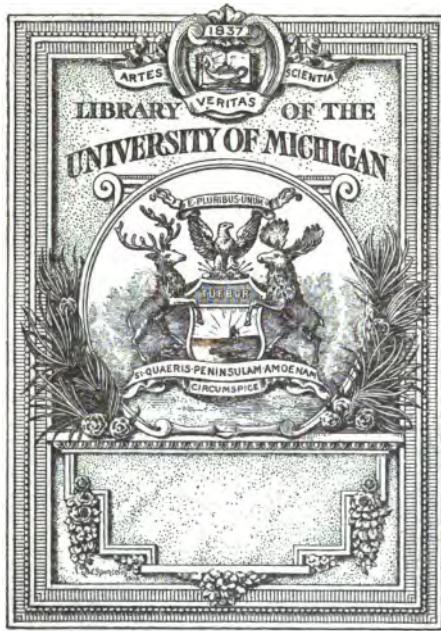
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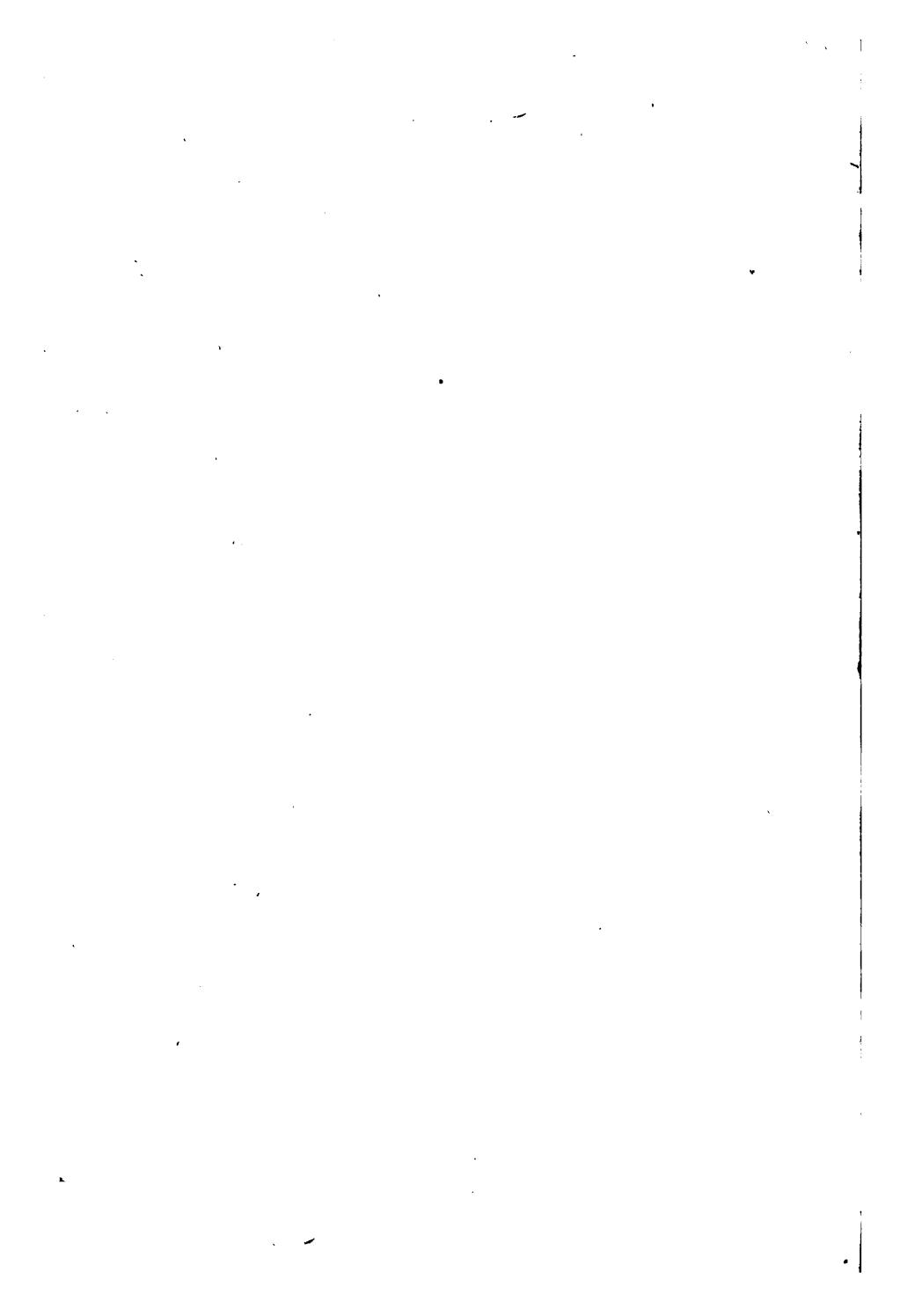
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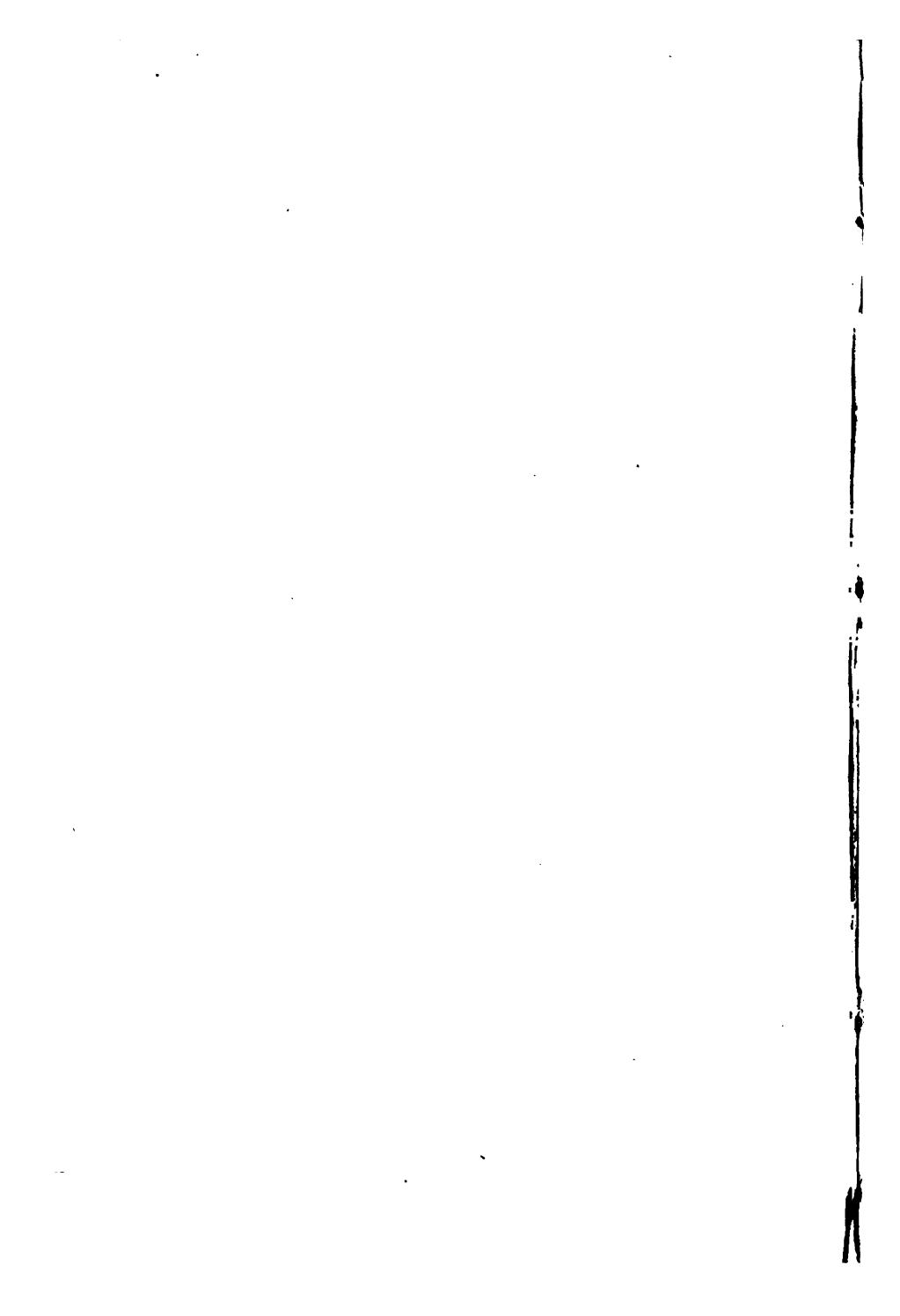
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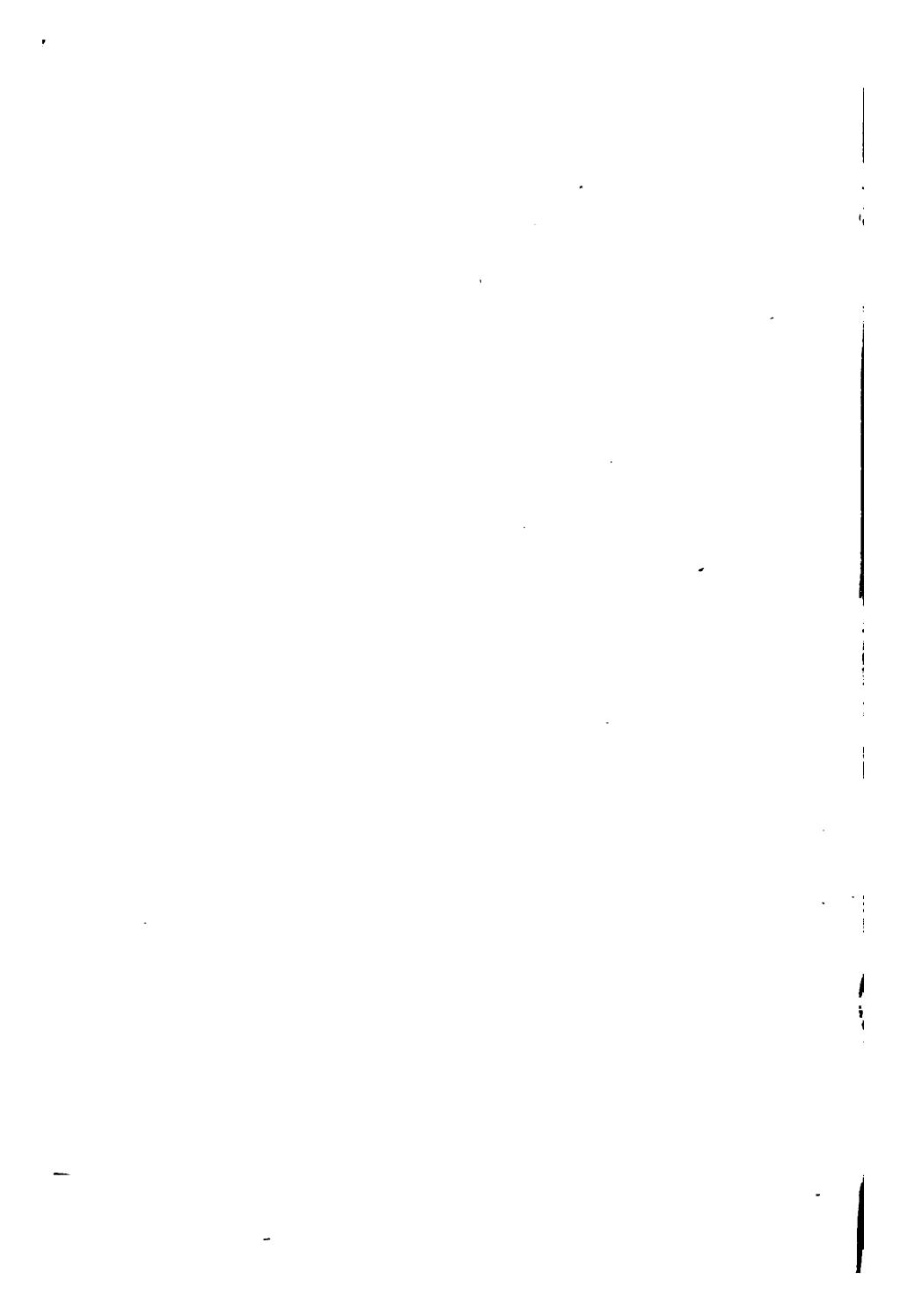
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THE HOUSE OF DREAMS



The House of Dreams

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BY

WILLIAM J. DAWSON



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THE HOUSE OF DREAMS

THE PROLOGUE

IN the dark of night, while the city slept, there came to me a vision of certain things that happened behind the Veil.

The last words that I had heard before the spirit of sleep laid his finger on the porches of sound and sight, gently closing them, was the saying of Cyril Reade,—‘Your God is dead, for none hear His breath ; He is certainly asleep, for none can waken Him.’ Cyril laughed bitterly as he spoke, and passed his hand slowly over his young brow, on which deep lines were already written ; for life had gone but ill with him of late. A bank had failed, and he whose habits had been those of the easy student, had been forced to sell his books, and find a drudging means of livelihood in an office. His mother had died the year before, and his wife died a year earlier. He was

thus left alone, and he had little genius for friendship. His mind was equally divided between vague enthusiasms, leading to the goal of a radical reconstruction of society, and a melancholy conviction that no sane reconstruction of society was possible.

Thus it happened that young men of undistracted hopefulness of temper, found him uncongenial, and those whose creed was thorough-going cynicism found him unsatisfactory. The men of merely sordid mind avoided him altogether. He took no interest in their pleasures, and made no effort to conceal his disdain. He had no friend in the office, and outside the office-door the world was inhospitable to him. So his mind grew bitter in him as he walked the stony streets, and he said to me as we parted by the railings of St. Clement Danes, 'Your God is dead, for none can discern his breath ; He is certainly asleep, for none can waken Him.'

It was bitter cold. The freezing wind drove like a host of hostile spears along the street. Strong men drew the collars of their overcoats around their ears and fled from it ; thinly-clothed people stooped before it, and shivered with a fear of what the night would be. A man stood beside the railings of the church, offering matches in his swollen hands. His face was grey with cold, his eyelids red, his eyes like

a dog's, patient and reproachful. Near him stood a woman, with a child huddled to her bosom in a frayed shawl. She spoke from time to time in a weak mechanical voice, as though she were reciting a lesson. The voice was hoarse, and its tone leaden. The mire of the street, flung by a thousand passing wheels, spattered her, but she took no notice. It was the unmemorable accident of a life of misery. High in the air a clock struck four, and over the roar of streets instantly a mellow music broke from a hundred steeples. It was as though the notes were caught up like leaves in a great wind, and went whizzing past in a kind of ghostly murmur. The streets replied with a louder roar of thunder, and the wheels rolled on vindictive over the body of the dead Hour.

'Ah,' said Cyril, 'who cares for these—for this man and woman, and the thousands like them? Look at the man's hands, see how the nails are broken, the joints swelled, the fingers bent. That is the hand of a man who has toiled. Your beggar by profession never had a hand like that. That hand has delved the earth or held the plough that we might be fed; it has cut the tunnels through which the lighted trains rush night and day; it has perhaps controlled the lever on which the happiness of a hundred homes

depended ; it has found its tasks in the iron bowels of great steamships, amid oil and dust and heat ; it is by such a hand that the great machine we call civilisation is kept at work. It has grown weak now, and no one wants it. There is a deep scar across those blue knuckles ; fire did that. There is a bulging at the wrist, where it was broken long ago. That will be an accusing hand for somebody, when it is lifted up above the throng of angels in the Day of Judgment !'

The man seemed to fancy that Cyril was speaking of him. He hobbled slowly from his perch, holding out his matches. Two well-dressed men were passing, fresh from a late luncheon. Their hands were thrust deep into the pockets of their fur-lined coats.

'Can't feel for ha'pence this weather,' said one, smiling as though he had made a joke.

'They ought to lock such scarecrows up,' said the other, 'they're a nuisance.'

'I told you so,' said Cyril. 'No one cares. Yet it is not inconceivable that that very woman worked to clothe those two fellows in their fur coats. Let us ask her how she came to beg in the streets.'

The woman's leaden voice took a little note of briskness as he spoke to her. 'I've worked at lots of things in my time, I has,' she said ; 'makin' match-boxes at tuppence-farthing a gross and find your own

paste ; shirt-makin' and trouser-makin' too ; last o' all I worked for a furrier, a-pickin' over skins. That's what did for me. The nasty stuff got on my chest, an' I haven't never been well since. Then the baby comed, and that finished me !'

She stopped to cough. Her flat chest heaved and shook like a paper screen in the wind. The baby woke and cried—a husky weak cry, piteous to hear.

'Told you so,' said Cyril with increased bitterness. 'the stitches wrought by that woman's thin fingers are very likely on my back and yours at this hour. She paid her lungs as the price of those fellows' fur coats. Look at her face. That blanched whiteness means famine. I can see death grinning through the sunken cheeks. She 'll be under the rotten soil of a city cemetery directly, and those two bulls of Bashan in fur coats will go on stalking through the earth, and neither know nor care : my God, to think of it all !'

He shuddered, and put his hand before his eyes. 'I can hear Death sharpening his scythe on the steps of St. Clement Danes,' he whispered. And then he added the sentence I have already twice recorded : 'Your God is dead, for none can hear his breath ; He is certainly asleep, for none can waken Him.'

THE COMING OF THE DREAM

IT was in the dark of night, while men slept, that the Vision came.

My house is a solitary one, and has been so ever since the Little Child died. For you must know that we never had but the one child, and he was sickly. We always knew that he would die. When he was an infant we fought death more than once on his behalf, snatching him back again into our bosoms ; but something told us that he could not remain there. It was as if a shadow, soft and luminous, henceforth rested on the child. He had a sweet gravity of disposition, and a seriousness of aspect, that were out of place in childhood. Sometimes we felt as if the shadow which had fallen on him, had also come between us and him ; we saw him, as it were, through a mist, and watched his comings and goings with aching hearts and wondering eyes. He cared nothing

for play or games of any sort, and his indifference pained us. He had little wise ways with him, and curious forms of speech; any one could see that his chief occupation was the tiny drama of his own thoughts. Sometimes we imagined that as he grew stronger, the genuine boy-nature must waken in him; but it was not to be. We never prayed for him aloud without a break in our voices, or silently without a pain in our hearts. Ah, how many times have we looked at him while he slept, and pressed each other's hands without a word, not daring to confess what we thought and feared.

Parents who have only strong and healthy children do not know with what an agony of tenderness the father and mother look day by day upon an only child whose hold on life is fragile. If the child coughed never so slightly, our hearts stood still; if at night his cheek was flushed, we trembled. On his mother's face I watched the growth of quite a new expression—an alertness as of one always listening for a脚步 in the dark, a softness in the eyes as of unshed tears; and I doubt not she saw the same things in my face. Sometimes I almost thanked God for this pain of infinite solicitude, and half persuaded myself that the tenderness it taught me was worth the

price of the anxiety I suffered. At times as the child sat in the library with me, I had to turn my face from his to hide my tears. He would sit still for hours together, looking at a picture-book, or watching the red hollows in the fire, his head with its fair curls resting on his hand like an old man's. If the sun came blinking into the room, he would rise very quietly, and go to the window, where he stood watching it. Often he would make quaint remarks, as all thoughtful children do; imagined the sun so near at daybreak that one might easily reach it 'if he got up in time'; and described a thunderstorm at sunset as 'the noise the sun made falling down stairs.' Nothing could persuade him that flowers had not souls; when he found that a flower had withered in the night, he always said, 'Well, its soul's run off in the dark.' Such things come back to one at intervals like vague remembered music. I do not recollect half the child said, but I believe his mother has not forgotten a single word. She keeps her yearly calendar by the sayings and doings of the child; she has a book in which they are written down. Only yesterday I saw in a cabinet she uses some withered rose-leaves; it was the rose that stood beside the child as he died—outliving him by a day; and beside it lay a book with entries such as these:

—‘June 12th, Found Willy talking to a flower: he said he could hear the flower breathe’; and this, (a week before the end) ‘Willy much better: I am sure now that he will live. My gratitude is great; I can’t thank God enough.’ We never talk of the child now, but it is because he is too well remembered—not because he is forgotten. His mother wears a curl of his next her heart, and I verily believe there is no moment of her life when she does not feel the soft warmth of his head against her bosom, as she did in the first happiness of motherhood, when he lay there as an infant.

On this night after my conversation with Cyril Reade I went to bed early, but I found sleep difficult. My brain was as a lighted theatre where an endless drama is enacted. At first the scenes were familiar; the past marched processionally across the stage; the faces, gestures, and voices of the actors were known and anticipated. Odd fragments of conversation uttered many years before were repeated; a ceaseless dialogue went on. There seemed to be nothing I had ever seen or heard, no lightest word, no casual picture painted for an instant on the unconscious eye, that did not reproduce itself with a painful and appalling vividness. A sense of astonishment possessed me: it seemed I had forgotten

nothing that had ever happened to me; a growing sense of irritation, too; for listen as I would I could find no coherence in the tiresome drama. Yet I was certain that in this ceaseless jumbled dialogue there was a thread of cogency, if I could find it; that immense issues were at stake, a supreme crisis imminent, and that the master-hand of a mighty but invisible Dramatist was at work upon the rapid scenes. Suddenly the stage was empty, the lights burned low. A greyness stole across it, as a slow mist creeps upon a wood, becoming more impenetrable each instant. And out of the mist rose silently a woman's form, as though the grey air took shape and grew compact. Her face was lean and fleshless, her eyes sombre. On her heart one arm held a little child; the other arm was lifted, that she might lay a finger on her lips. She spoke no word, she made no motion: her very immobility was dreadful. She stood listening for some expected sound, and meanwhile a slow wailing music, momentarily becoming quicker as if keeping pace with her growing expectation, filled the air. And then I saw that the woman was she whom I had spoken with that afternoon by the church of St. Clement Danes; only changed by some majesty of grief into a dignity more than human, all the sorrow of the world looking from

her mournful eyes, and the tears frozen on her pale cheeks. And at that I woke with trembling and astonishment.

It was midnight, and the wind piped drearily against the window and bellowed in the chimney. I said, 'I will sleep no more'; and hastily dressing, went down the stair to the library, intent on finding some book to beguile the tedious hours. The full moon was shining now, and I needed no other light.

I opened the library-door softly, afraid lest I should disturb the silence of the sleeping house. And then I paused, in a rush of joy so intense that all fear was swallowed up, nor in all that followed was I conscious of any terror.

The moon shone through the large uncurtained windows of the library, and in the full stream of silver light stood my child. He stood beside the window, where he had so often watched the wonder of the sun. The fair curls still fell around his brow, but now they seemed composed of innumerable threads of pure light; his raiment was white, mingling and merging in the soft moonshine, but separable from it, and in his right hand he held a rose which filled the room with odour. But he was no more a little sickly child. His height was the

height of youth; his cheek was rounded, and had the bloom of a flower upon it; his whole frame was knit together in perfect symmetry. He smiled as I entered, but did not come to me. Yet I thought the air trembled and grew sweet with his caress.

I remember how sometimes I had pictured to myself the terror I should feel if I saw a ghost. But, as I have said, now that my own eyes saw that which is deemed invisible, I felt no fear, and, indeed, no surprise. It seemed rather a thing wholly natural and right that I should thus meet my child again. For why should we, who talk constantly of death as nothing more than a frail curtain hung between us and the Infinite, shudder and be terrified when God holds back the curtain for an instant that we may see that which we always knew to exist upon the other side?

So, when I said, 'Is it you, my son?' my voice shook for joy, but not for fear.

'It is I,' he answered.

'But you are changed,' I said.

'In Eden every flower is blown,' he replied, speaking very softly.

I stood silent a moment. The words he had used were the words of a dying poet, and I pondered how

he should know them. He seemed to read my thoughts, and said—

‘Where I am now no bud is ever blighted. Men and women become at once all they meant to be, and perhaps tried in vain to be on earth. The poet who could not make his song come right on earth, finds it grow of itself there. The people who were starved and sorrowful for lack of love, find the seeds of love ripening in their hearts in a single night. The man who sought to do great things and failed, finds his dream attained. Even the sickly little child, after one brief sleep in the House of Dreams, wakes up a youth, strong and happy, for the thing that God meant always comes to be.’

‘Tell me more,’ I said, ‘more about this House of Dreams.’

‘It is the House to which all men go in the hour when they leave the earth,’ he replied. ‘It is a house so vast that no creature has seen it all, for in it there is a certain room for every man, woman, or child who has ever lived. And in each room there is a tablet, like a silver stone, in which the whole life of the man, or woman, or child hangs reflected. This tablet is the record of the things they have done. But beside it hangs another tablet, like a stone of polished gold, in which is reflected all they meant to do and be.

This records the inner life of their spirits, which none know but themselves.'

'I do not understand,' I said.

'That is why I am here,' he made reply. 'God has let me come that I may show you. Some men think that God has forgotten His world; others that He is unjust; many think it impossible that He should know all that happens to everybody. But those who have stood within the House of Dreams know better. They know that every man is made judge over himself—the tablets cannot lie. If there be but the faintest image in the golden tablet of anything good or noble that the man wished to be, when he wakes his desire is gained. But if he only wished for things that make him ignoble and vile, when he wakes he also finds that he is what he wished. And that is terrible. Yet he cannot murmur; he has judged himself.'

The Child stood silent, with a great solemnity shining in his eyes. Then he said, 'Come, that I may show you.'

The moonlight quivered for an instant like a lifting wave, and my hand sought the Child's. For the first time I noticed on his shoulders two tiny fans of flame, and I saw his feet were winged. Then the wave of light rose silently beneath us both. Something dark,

and starred with intricate and tangled ropes of light lay far below—it was the mighty city. A ship tossed upon the moonlit sea, a mountain raised its peak of crystal. Then all faded, and the child and I were alone in the silence of the Infinite.

II

THE HOUSE OF DREAMS

THE House of Dreams lies at the eastmost verge of Heaven, and therefore nearest to the Land of Sleep, where tired men lay them down in the shadow of the setting sun.

Its walls are built of opal, having the colour of fire mingled with snow ; its doors are of mother-of-pearl ; its gateways are fashioned of crystal, like unto pure yet softened light. Beside each gateway stands a tall angel, yet is the angel not separable from the gateway, but, as it were, a part of it. For in the ever-shifting colours of the opal, faces come and go, and eyes look out of the tints of mother-of-pearl, and living forms are faintly outlined in the crystal, like fair bodies seen through lucid sea-water, so that the whole vast edifice seems alive, and the angels of the gateways seem each instant newly fashioned out of

the crystal pillars that fold them like a flame, or like a water simulating flame.

Awe fell upon me as I watched this sight, for there was in it a thing wonderful and dreadful. The walls were never still an instant, a gust of life ever passing through them as the sea-water is shaken with the tide, and the faces came and went as the swift fires burn and vanish in the opal. And, looking downward, I perceived that the pavement also was built up of life, so that I trod delicately lest I should hurt that on which I walked. And voices spoke within the walls, and in the pavement at my feet, making an endless murmuring of sound, joyous and musical. And the sound was like the distant calling of a multitude, and at times it seemed as if these infinite voices said one great word of praise, after which a silence fell.

Then I looked upon the Child, for so I called him still in my thoughts, though I knew that he was as the angels; but the Child stood very still watching the rose within his hand. And once more, as I looked, the murmuring of voices ran through all the place like a gust of wind, and through the pavement at my feet, and the angels at the gateways took a brighter aspect as if the sun smote on them, and all the walls uttered a sound of praise.

Then one stood beside me, whose eyes read my

thoughts, and of him I asked what these things might mean.

'This is the world where life is for evermore,' he answered. 'Even in that world from which you journeyed,'—and here he pointed to a small star burning faintly in the abyss,—'all things lived.'

'But all things died too,' I said.

'They could not know death unless they had first known life,' he answered.

'But there was that we called animate, and that we called inanimate. The flower of the field lived, but not as man lived; and the dumb beast lived, but the beast knew no trouble of the soul such as man knew. By a figure of speech,' I went on, now growing bolder, 'we did sometimes speak of the leaves of the forest as living and dying, but it was a mere metaphor. They had no conscious life.' And in saying this, it was the wonder and the contradiction of these living walls that moved my thoughts.

'And who told you that?' he said gravely. 'Did you think God so sterile in invention that He was able to give to man alone the power of thinking and of loving? Your wise men told you that flowers had marriages: did they not also tell you that flowers had thought? Was there nothing that looked out of the eyes of dumb animals like that which looked

from the eyes of men? And why call them dumb, when it was plain they talked to one another, you perhaps seeming to them just what they seemed to you,—dumb also, because they could not teach you their language? And did you never walk in a wood at daybreak or at nightfall, and hear the leaves speaking? Listen now to what you hear, and say what it resembles.'

And again the long sigh of life went through all the place, marvellously like the sound of leaves innumerable shaken in a forest, or of little waves that talked along a shore.

'You hear,' he said. 'God is not a God of the dead, but of the living. It is of the nature of God to abhor death. The very walls and pillars of this house are living things that gladly serve Him—the very rivets of the universe are alive, and have His pulse in them.'

And as the Angel spoke my eyes fell before his glance, so that once more I took note of the pavement at my feet. And straightway there came to me a memory of how I had once looked down through clear sea-water in a little cove beside a reef of coral, and had seen strange things; for each instant fishes wonderful in colour, like pieces of a broken rainbow, swam past; and what had seemed

pulp and sand stirred and took a shape ; and great sea-flowers opened silently and closed again as though they breathed ; and the sea's bottom seemed a kingdom, where a hundred cities in miniature existed, each one swarming with inhabitants. And even so, looking down through this translucent pavement, I saw forms and faces unnumbered, ever and again floating so near the surface, as it might be called, that I withdrew my feet for fear that I should injure or dishonour these submerged flowers of life.

' You marvel much at this,' said the Angel, ' yet in the world from which you came all things were the same. Trees and flowers and birds and the creatures you call dumb all have a spiritual form and essence. To man God gave five senses only ; but there was a sixth, which here and there a wise man possessed, by which he saw the spiritual that dwelt always in the earthly. Such men spoke in fables only, and even then men of the five senses thought them mad ; but when they said they heard the spirit of the tree lamenting as the woodman's axe crashed through the tender bark ; or spoke of fairies dwelling in the flowers, or of the spirit of the wind, or of the shapes of the dead gliding softly through the fields that they had loved, they did but speak the truth. They saw these things, for they

possessed the sixth sense. They saw the world as utterly alive in every vein and pore.

'What you see here is but the fulness of what they saw in part yonder. (There is nothing inanimate where God is.) Yea, did not Christ say, that if men had not praised Him the very stones of the street would have cried out; for He knew well that even the stones had life, and felt what foot it was that trod them.'

And behold, at the name of Christ, all these palaces of God seemed to shudder with an awful joy, and the walls cried *Alleluia*.

'Look at your child, and you will understand,' said the angel. 'Watch him.'

And, as I looked, I saw that the child had stooped his face above the rose he held, and was talking to it. And while he spoke the rose in his hand changed shape and colour, expanding mystically, till presently it seemed a little globe of flame; and the flame became whiter and purer each instant, till wings sprang out of it, as wings emerge from the broken chrysalis; and then a human shape came to it, like a new-born child; and the child grew till, lo, it was a fair maiden; and the maiden stood beside my son, radiant as he, each finding joy in the aspect of the other,

'He always said that flowers had souls,' I murmured, and my thoughts went back to that dark house, and that grey room, where I had often watched the child talking to a flower.

'He had the sixth sense,' said the angel, 'He was right.'

'And that was why we thought him strange?'

'That was why: he was a poet. You thought him strange, but to him it was a much stranger thing that you did not see what he saw. You did not know how lonely the child was, and so God took him.'

'I loved him,' I said, with proud resentment, for the words cut me like a reproach.

'You loved him, yes: but you did not understand,' said the angel in a tone so soft, that I knew he pitied me. The time would have come when you would have bid him put his foolish dreams away. You would have had him taught some task against which his heart rebelled. You would presently have had him enlist in the race for what dull men value most —gold. You would even have been angry because he did not succeed. Do not interrupt,—I know. As time went on, you and he would have grown more and more estranged. You would not have minded so much if other men had seen anything beautiful or

wonderful about his gift ; but it was destined that many, many years should pass before that could happen. And in the meantime he was weak and sickly ; he would have suffered much ; he would have felt bitterly your disappointment in him, and would have known himself incapable of preventing it ; his life would have been a tragedy. Only now and then does God let the poet live out his full days on earth, for only at long intervals does there rise a man capable of enduring the bitter discipline, and triumphing. Your child would not have triumphed. He would have been bruised and hurt beyond endurance in the struggle, and worst of all, his gift would have perished. So God took him. God is kind.'

I trembled at the words, yet something told me they were true. I remembered that I had had great visions of my child's success in life. And as I thought, looking in the crystal at my feet, I saw a spot of darkness like a spreading cloud, and it formed itself into a picture. The picture of a narrow garret with one smoke-grimed window ; of a youth lying on a poor bed, pale and sad ; a table beside him with a crust of bread, and many papers ; a letter in his hand, which bore my name, over which we wept. The picture vanished almost in the instant that it came ; and instead of it the crystal held a multitude of faces,

listening radiant with pleasure, open-lipped and eager,
while a youth sang to them some ecstatic song.

'You have seen: was it not better so?' said the
angel.

And I, with bowed head, answered humbly, 'Yea;
it is well with the child.'

And once more the living music throbbed through
all the place, and far-off a multitude of voices cried
'*Alleluia*', and then a great silence fell.

III

THE SANCTUARY OF THE WIND

FROM the great gateway of the House of Dreams the road slopes earthward, and it is by this road the pilgrims of eternity reach the infinite.

Near the gateway this road is broad and firm like a solid sea, but in the great distances it becomes a film of splendour, and lastly a mere thread of light, like a slender bridge, uniting earth with heaven. Worlds innumerable hang in clusters in the deep abyss, like gold or silver fruit upon a tree whose branches are concealed ; and here and there a stain of light upon the sky shows where worlds are being born, and here and there a fading point of red declares some world whose work is done quietly burning out, as a candle in a socket. And the sky is not as it is with us, a great expanse of blue with stars and planets at long intervals, but it is sown so thick with stars that there is no night there, nor can be.

C

For beyond all forms and shapes that the eye can see, there still move clouds of glittering dust, like the sand-pillars in a desert; yet is each grain of this star-dust a world larger than the earth, and each world obeys silently the rhythmic order of the heavens.

Now it happened in my dream, as I watched this supreme vision of the works of God, that I saw afar off something moving like a bead of light along the road that led earthward; and even as I looked it came nearer, travelling with a speed inconceivable, till at last I discerned a company of angels, bearing in their midst the newly-dead. And the angels and the newly-dead passed into the House of Dreams, and as they entered bade me follow. And then there came straightway to my mind what the child had said about the silver and the golden tablets whereby men were judged, and a strong curiosity moved me to see what these things meant.

Now as one enters the House of Dreams the first place that is reached is a great vestibule, which is called the Sanctuary of the Wind. It has neither roof nor walls as we count such things; but ten thousand angels make a wall around it, and living forms rise over it in lessening tiers, so that it is as though one looked up into the leafy height of a great

forest, only that each leaf is a face ; and as though one looked round on the far-ranged colonnades of the forest, but behold, each tree is an angel, motionless and solemn. And this again is noticeable : that all these congregated forms stand open-lipped and eager, as if waiting for a sign to speak, and listening or watching for a footfall : so that expectation hangs tremulous upon the air. The silence of the place is dreadful ; yet is the silence, as it were, sound suspended, not extinguished : for the pulse of breathing runs through the dome and walls, as though a common heart beat through this living temple, measuring the moments of the infinite. In this great vestibule the angels laid the newly dead.

For a time I dared not look upon the Thing that lay upon the bier in the very centre of this silence, for my human repugnance to death was still strong upon me. Yet it lay there so lonely that I could have wept for it. The limbs were straightened out in decent composure : the hands lay upon the breast in utter humbleness, the grey and awful face bore the aspect of an infinite surprise and pain. In this realm of perfect life it seemed a thing anomalous and dreadful.

The Angel at my side again read my thoughts, and said, 'Come near, and look upon the dead,' and I

came, and behold it was the woman I had seen with the infant at her breast beside the Church of St. Clement Danes.

‘She is dead,’ I said, with awe.

‘She is not dead, but sleepeth,’ he replied.

And even as he spoke a strange thing began to happen. For far up in the apex of the dome a glow began to spread, ever overflowing in warmer radiance, till all the dome became one living rose of light. And the light, still rippling downward, touched the walls, and stained them also with the colour of the living rose, so that it seemed as though I stood within the inverted calyx of a glorious flower. And the glow fell upon the face of the dead woman, so that the greyness and awfulness went out of it; and the years, as well as the shadow of death, fell from it like a mist, leaving it young and bright. He who has seen the sunrise on a great array of snow-clad mountains may faintly figure what this thing meant; for even as the icy peaks, quiet and cold as death, become instantly the fire-robed archangels of the day, so this light came as the essential light of life, transfiguring all it touched.

‘And now,’ said the Angel, ‘listen, for the mystic Wind is about to blow.’

‘And what Wind is that?’ I said; for his words

seemed so strange that I comprehended them not.

'The Wind is the Wind of the Maker,' he replied. 'It is the Soul of God who breathes through all things. It is never seen, it is rarely felt; yet it *is*. Did not one of your own poets say of the awakening of the earth in spring, 'Thou sendest forth thy wind, they are created, and Thou renewest the face of the earth'? And did not a yet greater One speak of the wind that blew where it listed, of which men heard the sound indeed, but knew not whence it came or whither it went? Nay, hast not thou thyself known the coming and the going of the Wind of the Maker in the soul; and have not your poets, and others in whom the sixth sense dwelt, spoken of waiting for the inspiration of the Highest, and of all their best work as not their own, but the utterance of some other Power that spoke and thought within and through them?'

And as he spoke many memories came to me of the things which men had said of strange pressures on their spirits, and sudden births of impulse in their hearts, and I wondered much that I had never understood them. Yet, perhaps, they understood not themselves; speaking only in an unintelligible language of things beyond their reach.

And while I thought, far-off there pealed the voice of a trumpet, very faint yet clear, and then a great voice cried, 'Blow, O wind, on these dry bones, that they may live!' And the voice cried thrice, and the innumerable angels, crowded tier on tier, stooped eager-lipped and listening, and the silence deepened.

And then, at last, it came : a soft rushing of divinest air, like the sigh of a sleeper ; and the faces of the angels were kindled into rapture as a fire is quickened by the draught, and a faint rustling of ten thousand plumes of flame filled the place, and I hid my face for very awe, yet was it the awe of a supreme delight. Thrice had the Voice cried, and thrice there came that heavenly gust of air ; for the Godhead is Triune in all its acts and revelations. And the Wind touched the form upon the bier ; and at its first breath the hands of the dead woman moved ; and at the second, a tiny pulse thrilled in her temples, and I saw the little veins grow bluer in the closed eyelids, and a smile hovered round her mouth ; and at the third, she sat up, and looked round like a child awakened from its dreams. And then the Wind came no more, but once again a Voice spake, at whose sound love and trembling filled the heart, crying, 'I have the keys of Death and Hades, and am alive for evermore.' And I knew it was the Son of Man who spake.

Far off through the worlds the mystic Wind sped, and I knew then that it was the Wind of Life, and that there was no more death. And I knew also that with God there is neither form nor substance, nor beginning nor end, yet is He the All, and is in all. For He alone needs no form, nor can be compassed by form; but inhabiteth eternity and so pervades all things.

And in that moment I remembered many of those earthly thoughts that had made a torture and a darkness of my mind. For it had often been to me a thing inconceivable that God should know and care for all the creatures He had made ; but now I saw that all my error lay in my foolish conception of God as form, for form imposes limits, and He is illimitable. And as all men dwell equally in the illimitable atmosphere, and breathe the common air, so all men dwell in God, and share equally in Him. And as one cannot dwell nearer to the atmosphere than another, so all men stand equally near to God, who folds them like an atmosphere. And so there is neither Nearness nor Farness with God, nor Place, nor Time, nor Number, nor Space nor Dimension ; He, alone being the Beginning and the End, and the First and the Last, and the One and the All, and His reckoning being not by years or centuries of years, but from Everlasting to Everlasting.

And behold, my thought uttered itself through
my very silence, and a solemn whisper grew and
gathered, the very air, as it were, crying, 'He is from
Everlasting to Everlasting.'

And the woman who had been dead stood beside
the empty bier and smiled.

IV

THE UNUTTERED

WHILE I stood lost in the wonder of these thoughts, the Angel, whom God had made my guide, spake and said, 'Now knowest thou the All-glorious?'

And I replied, 'Yea, I have felt Him.'

'And knowest thou now what the Sixth Sense is?' he asked.

And I replied, 'It is the sense that sees where no vision is.'

'And not that alone,' he answered; 'it is also the perception of the imperceptible. For on earth men and women communicate mainly by speech, but here thought overhears thought, and silence has a thousand tongues. Hast thou not already felt the silence of this higher world, and found it blissful?'

And, in truth, the place was very still. For all these angels that I saw spake no word either to other, nor was there any sound except that of the

one word of praise that fell like the diapason of a breaking wave at intervals. Yet did their faces yearn either to other, and I perceived dimly that their thoughts embraced and were social. Also I remembered that already the Angel at my side had given me answers to my thought when the thought was yet unuttered, so that it was plain that here soul touched soul, and mind entered into mind by means and methods that man knows not of.

Also I perceived, and for the first time, that language, as we know it, is equally the embarrassment and the expression of the soul. For some men have it not, and can never rightly utter themselves ; and some possess it so imperfectly that it hides rather than displays their thought ; and some debase it, so that they say perpetually the things they do not mean. And love in its intensest ecstasy is silent, and sorrow also in its divinest woe is dumb. And lovers there are who dwell together through long years, yet grope blindly at the door of language which is locked between them, neither being able to clasp the other close in perfect unity, because neither can unlock this door of words. And, again, words wrongly uttered have set nations on fire, and bred estrangement, and sown the seeds of deadly enmity ; so that language has been but a bitter blessing at the best.

Also I perceived that even among men the human soul utters itself not by language only ; for the painter speaks by the tongueless beauty of his art, and the sculptor by the voiceless lips of his immobile effigy, which is but dead marble after all. And lovers speak by clasped hands, and the glance of fond eyes, and the meeting of warm lips ; and the stars write their wisdom on the spectroscope without sound ; and across a crowd the faces of men flash messages, even as the heavens declare the glory of God across the abyss of space. And the angel read my thoughts, and said, 'Come with me, that I may teach thee the mystery of the unuttered.'

Now in the eastmost portion of the Sanctuary of the Wind sprang a fountain, of the colour of amber, as though fire mingled in the water ; and beside it grew a tree, which is the Tree of Knowledge. And of the fruit of this tree the Angel bade me taste, saying, 'When thou hast eaten, the Sixth Sense shall be fully thine.' And I ate ; and straightway a bitter pain smote me, as though the veil of being were rent in twain ; and after the pain came a joy that was itself akin to pain ; and then a sense of infinite felicity, and then a peace, which was the peace of God. And the Angel said, 'What seest thou ?'

And I looked, and behold each angel in all that

mighty concourse was a Thought, and when they moved the noise of their wings was like the voice of speech, and as the noise of a host. Yet spake they no word either to other. And behold the brow of the angel at my side was like a fair crystal, on which shadows came and went, and images, and a starry fire ; and these also were thoughts, and I understood them. And there was nothing in his mind which I could not see, nor aught in me that was concealed from him. And our minds met and mingled, as the separate notes and chords blend in perfect music.

And I looked and saw a man and woman pass whom I had known on earth, and this was their story. They had been man and wife, but he dwelt solitary in a world of thought whither the woman could not follow him, for her mind was simple and unlearned, and his ever sought the veiled face of abstract Truth. And though they loved each other dearly, yet, as the years sped, a chasm grew between them ; and she sighed to see him so silent, but knew that if she spoke, her words would seem light and foolish to him ; and he saw her drift away from him, but had no power to hold her fast. And sometimes he was angry with her, and wondered if he had not been happier with another mate, whose mind would have been the twin-star of his own ; and often

she lay awake at night, and thought, 'He had been a greater man without me : I am but a drag upon him after all.' And often she rose quietly in the night while he slept, and prayed that God would give her grace, and instruct her how to be a better helpmeet to him ; and at times she made desperate efforts to read the books he read, and understand them; but when she tried to speak of them he laughed, and told her plainly that such things were beyond her. And so it was as though a wall of ice came between them, through which they saw each other, and the house grew very cold ; so that, at last, the cold found the woman's heart, and she died. And then the man knew what he had lost, and his grief was terrible. He remembered a hundred things in her greater than wisdom, and wiser than the knowledge of the sages. He raged against himself, that he had never uttered the little foolish speeches of affection which a woman loves to hear, and which are as the unnoticed dew that keeps the flower of love fresh. Yet he also knew that if he had her back again, nothing would be altered ; for the man was reticent, and speech was always difficult to him, and his tongue perpetually betrayed him, saying ever the thing he did not mean. And it was this knowledge that broke his heart. It was the very rage of love that killed him, and he died in bitter

silence. Yet now these two walked together, and their faces were as mirrors in which the same sky hangs reflected ; and though they spoke not, yet could I perceive the soul of each leaning out, as it were, to touch the other soul ; and sometimes they seemed but one, so commingled were they in each other, as bright flames perpetually are sucked into one another in a kind of rapture.

And the Angel said, 'Even so is it here. Those who love neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels.'

And I saw yet another thing that was wonderful to me. For near the Tree of Knowledge sat one whom many men, and I also, had known on earth as one who held the keys of wisdom, and his face was grave and solemn, yet joyous withal. Now this man, toil as he would had never among men made his message quite clear : for the gift of words was denied him, and could not be won. And this was pain and grief to him, for though in his own mind truth shone like a sun, yet could not he impart his visions ; for in his hands language grew harsh and crabbed, and was as a muddy vesture flung upon the fair silver-shining form of truth. So the world paid little heed to him, saying briefly, 'He is mad' ; and the same world ran eagerly after many lesser men and praised them,

because they had learned the artifice of concealing poverty of thought beneath a fair-woven fabric of abundant words. Thus it was as if these lesser men passed a pin's-head point of light through the magnifying glass of words, so that the foolish saw in it a sun ; but this man dwelt in an excess of light which language could not comprehend. And so, when the man died, only here and there was one who knew the greatness of the light that perished with him, or guessed the agony he suffered in his inability to interpret and reveal the truth he saw. But now he sat beside the Tree of Knowledge, and his face wore the aspect of an awful joy ; for whosoever a bright image of thought rose within him, it passed like a winged light through all these ranks of angels, and heaven was brighter for it, and God Himself waxed glad. For it wrote itself infallibly on every mind, as the sun's ray writes itself upon the spectroscope, and he was understood ; and this without effort or any urgency of will, so that the joy of heaven for him was the perfectly harmonious expression of himself.

And the Angel said, 'This is one of God's greatest creatures, for the very joy of God is the expression of Himself; and this man was lower than the greatest angel only by the suffering of death. Yea, and having suffered death, he is now greater than the

greatest, for he has looked into the eyes of the Great Terror, whom angels may not see, and has overcome.'

And even while the Angel spoke, behold the man's soul conceived and travailed, and brought forth a Thought; and it passed like a wave of air, and shook my soul with an invisible delicious joy; yet being still of the earth earthy, I knew not wholly what it meant. But the angels knew, and smiled. And as the sunlight travels over a great forest, washing all the leaves with gold, so that smile spread through these realms of the eternal, and was a thing beautiful and awful to contemplate. For it was the Smile of God.

But I, being yet of the earth earthy, and still enamoured of the wonder of human speech, said at last, 'Has God, then, no language? Does God never speak?'

And the Angel answered, 'God is Silence, and dwells in the unuttered.'

And yet again, after a long pause, the Angel spake and said:—'Nevertheless, God hath compassion on the lowly, and hath been found within the limits of the human. For when man no longer knew how to worship through the unuttered, God also uttered Himself and spake. He spake the Word, and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God : that by the Word man might approach to God. And the Word God spake was Christ.'

And at that Name once more a wave of living joy rolled through all the worlds, and far off, like the murmur of a sea, a great host of voices sang '*Alleluia.*'

THE SIXTH SENSE

THEN, turning to my guide, I said—‘I would fain see the House where the Tablets of Judgment are set, that I may know how God’s ways with men are vindicated.’

But he replied, ‘Not yet. Thou must first look upon the vision of the earth, lest thou forget its ways.’

Whereupon he took me to a chamber lying near the fountain where the Tree of Knowledge grew, and as we went he said, ‘In the room to which we go all the earth hangs reflected, so that all that happens in it may be known. Not one act or word of any humblest creature comes to birth, that is not reduplicated there. Behold, thou shalt see how men stand close to infinite vision, yet scorn it and deny it; in their pride of the things known to the five senses refusing the knowledge that they themselves have

brought within reach, and might apprehend if they would.'

Now, the chamber to which we went was quite dark, and in it was a little plane of crystal, like the mirror I had seen when a boy in the *camera obscura*, and looking in the crystal I saw a perfect image of the earth. But in this divine crystal, behold, much more than the mere round globe of earth hung reflected, for the crystal possessed many properties unknown to earthly science. And the Angel said, 'What seest thou?'

And I answered, 'I see what seems the earth, but a shining atmosphere lies round it, like a silver mist.'

And he replied, 'Look closely at this atmosphere, and tell me what thou seest.'

And I looked, and behold, the silver mist shook and trembled, incessantly perturbed, like a shaken web of gossamer; and then I saw that it was composed of innumerable living forms, and these forms came and went, thick as motes within a sunbeam, and I marvelled, and I said, 'What are these?'

And he answered, 'These are the spirits of the dead, who still move in the gravitation of the earth, because the friends they love on earth are not yet set free. Some are mothers waiting for their children, some wives who want their husbands; for not until

the last tie of love to the earthly is wholly broken, can these fly heavenwards. So they move ever like a flight of doves drawn by the strong wind of the rushing earth, happy in their own freedom, but yet not wholly happy till each finds its mate. When that hour comes the gravitation of the earth draws them no more, and a wind of ecstasy uplists them to the inner heavens. Yet is the sphere wherein they dwell also heaven ; but it is the lower heaven, where the ache of earthly love is still felt.'

'And do these still discern those they love,' I asked, 'and are they still discerned of them ?'

'Look, and let the crystal answer,' he replied.

And all at once a shadow passed across the crystal, as the shadow of a cloud travels over breadths of summer sea : and when the cloud was gone, behold, the vision of the round earth was gone too, and instead of it I saw a dim-lit room. The room had three tall narrow windows, with drawn blinds. The place seemed bitter cold. A bed stood opposite the windows, and on it lay a little coffin, in which the child of a month lay like a still white flower : and then I knew whence the coldness came.

And while I watched a man came into the room, treading with fearful feet, and drew up the blinds. He was quite young, but his face looked old, and his

eyelids were red with tears, and he went softly with his finger on his lips. Then he beckoned to another man, who entered softly too, and brought with him a tripod covered with a dark cloth, which I knew to be a photographic camera.

'It is very strange,' said the second man, 'and I cannot explain it. Look, sir, for yourself.'

And the first man, who was the father of the dead child, took a photographic plate within his hand, and looked, and as he looked his face grew ashen. For the photograph was the picture of the dead child in his coffin. Yet was not that all ; for beside the child stood a thin grey shadow, and the man knew it for the figure of his wife, who had died a month before the child.

'It cannot be,' said the man, with a fearful cry. 'You have tampered with the plate. I am a materialist, and I know that death ends all. Would it were not so, but it is. But yet—and yet—' and the man covered his face and wept.

'I have not touched the plate,' said the second man gravely. 'It is of small account to me what you believe or disbelieve. But every one knows that the photographic eye sees what we cannot see. You yourself, sir, know well that stars invisible to man, report themselves upon the photographic plate of the

astronomer. In this case it would seem that the photographic eye has discerned a spirit where the human eye saw only empty space.'

'But I tell you it cannot be,' cried the first man. 'Man has no spirit. All thought is the blind movement of brain-cells. It is a monstrous, an impossible delusion. Some accident has happened to your plate —you and I have imagined the rest.'

The man flung himself on his knees beside the dead child, and cried in heart-moving tones, 'God knows, if there is a God, that I would give my life if this were true. But already she whom I loved lies overwhelmed in corruption. You also, my little one, must join her. We shall never meet again, there is nothing that survives whom we can meet. And yet there were times when I held her in my arms, and seemed to feel that there was more there than the warm loving flesh, something spiritual, immortal. . . . O, my God, if it were but true!'

The second man took the picture from the father's hand, and began to speak again in grave low tones.

'Listen, sir,' he said, 'and you shall judge. I am a man of no beliefs, save a belief in science. I do not go to church, I have never cared a rap for the things that men preach therein. I don't know whether there is any after-state, but I think it probable.

If you ask me for my reasons, I can only say, "There are more things in earth and heaven than are dreamed of in our philosophy." Science itself tells me *that*. Therefore, when I hear my children singing hymns about heaven, I don't interfere. I say simply, "Why not?" It is true I cannot see heaven, but what of that? You yourself know, sir, that the human eye is a most imperfect apparatus, and that the greatest of German oculists said that if any manufacturer sent him home such a blundering instrument he would return it in disgust, and refuse to pay for it. The lens is all right enough, but the retina is all wrong. In every retina there is what they call a dark spot, that is a part of the retina which doesn't work, and is quite useless. Well, if the retina were made properly who can tell that we might not see forms now hidden from us? Who can tell whether other creatures don't see them—see ghosts if you like—for it's well known that a hundred creatures have a far better organ of vision than man. I don't say it is so; but I say it might very well be so; and with a more sensitive retina man might quite as readily perceive the immaterial as the material.'

The man, kneeling beside the dead child lifted his face, and in his dimmed eyes scorn and eagerness strove for mastery.

'Well,' he said, 'spare me your theories: give me your facts.'

'The facts are simple enough, and you know them,' the other man replied. 'You bade me photograph your dead child and I did so. But when the plate was developed I saw a film in one corner of it, and put it aside as spoiled. I had taken three negatives, and I examined eagerly the other two. In each the same film appeared in just the same place. My own eyes assured me of that, and also of the fact that this film had the appearance of a human figure slightly stooped. I then put the plate under the strongest magnifying glass that I could purchase, and here is the result. The film *was* a human figure: it was a woman's figure: it was the figure of your dead wife. It was a mere shape of air, but it was unmistakable. See,'—and here the man's voice sank to a thrilling whisper,—'she is tall, she is clothed in white; her arms are stretched out and curved upwards as though they held a child; she is stooping slightly forward over the coffin; her lips smile, her eyes have thought and love in them, her hair falls round her in a cloud; she is changed in some unnameable way, but the same. I invent nothing, I surmise nothing. It may be all true that men have believed of guardian angels, or it may not. I remember that when my

own mother died she said that she saw my father waiting for her, and in the midnight silence of the room we heard her talking in whispers as if to some one we did not see. Thousands of similar stories might be told. They may be all hallucination for all I know. But the photographic plate does not lie. *It* has no hallucinations. And, as sure as we are here looking in each other's faces with the human eye, the photographic eye has seen your dead wife, and this is she!'

The man beside the bed sprang to his feet. His hand trembled, his lips hung loose and white, the tears poured like rain from his eyes.

'Let me see it again,' he cried.

He took the picture in his hand, and stood beside the window gazing on it.

'It is she, it is she!' he said; 'I do not believe, I know. Oh, fool that I was, to think that nothing lay beyond the senses! And a man can come with a dark box and a bit of glass and open Heaven to me! I grudge the grave its spoil no longer. I know now that *she* is beyond death, that we shall meet again.'

'Man,' he cried, as he grasped the hand of the photographer in a sort of frenzy, 'don't you see that if this is true, there is no more death? And that

men should want to die instead of wanting not to die? And that the Heaven your children sing about is all real and true ?'

And then I saw what the two men in the room of death could not see. I had seen it faintly even while they spoke ; I saw it clearly now. For in the corner of the room beside the bed the light shifted and gathered and took a shape ; and the shape was of a woman who held a month-old child upon her breast, and her lips touched the child's lips, and the child's eyes looked into hers and smiled, and there was a gladness ineffable upon her face.

And the woman and the child floated softly upward, till they touched that band of silver mist which lay around the earth, and were swallowed in it.

And I, waiting, said to the Angel, 'Will they soon arrive? Shall we see them come?'

But he replied, 'Not yet. They are not yet loosed from the gravitation of the earth. They abide yet many years, which are but God's moments, in the lower heaven. They are waiting for the Man.'

THE EYE THAT SAW

Now it happened that in all my earthly knowledge I had never heard mention of this dark spot in the retina of the eye, and it was a fact that set me thinking. I had often heard the common tales of ghost-seeing and of second sight, and had laughed at them as things fantastic and impossible. But now I could do so no more; for I had comprehended that if this patch of darkness exists in all, but with difference of degree, then one might behold what to another is truly invisible; the darkness in one covering so great an area that the eye were blind, and in another so narrow a space, that the eye were capable of abnormal vision. Thus the power of vision in one man could be no measure of the power of vision in another; which is a thing all men know to be true, since one sees men a hundred yards away as trees walking, and another sees the colour of their

raiment, and the familiar aspect of their features. And, again, the eagle from his crag gazes unabashed upon the sun, and the vulture from a measureless height in air beholds his prey; so that side by side with man move other creatures whose power of vision exceeds his own by a hundredfold. For to these glorious creatures of the wind God has given a retina where no dull and deadening spot of darkness breeds obscurity of vision; were it then a thing incredible, that here and there to the creatures fashioned in His own image, God should also give some special fineness of the optic nerve? And when the poet speaks of sunset clouds that bear stars upon their 'restless fronts,' and simulate a city of alabaster domes and silver spires, who shall say that he does not in truth behold what he describes; or, in like manner, when one says he has seen a spirit with folded wings and silent feet move round his house, may it not be that to him God has given an instrument of vision, wherein the film of darkness has diminished to a point, or wholly disappeared? For, if in one thing one man sees more than is granted to his fellows, why not in other things; and if one shall see the stars at midday—a thing impossible to most,—why shall not another see the ghosts of twilight and the spirits of the dark?

And my Guide, once more reading the nature of my thoughts, said, 'Look again into the crystal, and tell me what thou seest, and be attentive to the words thou hearest.'

And behold, a cloud, like a stain of breath, once more moved and trembled in the heart of the crystal, and then silently withdrew, and a picture formed itself. And this was what I saw and heard.

Far from north to south there ranged a great coast above a great sea, and on the topmost summit of the cliffs rose a little church. The cliffs ran sheer and black for a league or more, and beneath them the grey sea swung low and solemn. A flight of gulls sailed slow against the clouded sky, crying to one another an unintelligible message, and the wind of sunset had begun to blow. Eastward lay the white houses of a village, westward the red sails of fishing-boats spotted the horizon. In the church-tower a bell spoke at intervals, and with each stroke of the bell the gulls cried anew their shrill messages. At last, from the door of the church moved a slow and simple procession, composed of rude fishermen, and in their midst was borne the heavy burden of the dead. Behind the coffin moved a lonely man, very old, white of beard, and bent of shoulder, and as he walked he talked with himself, and the fishermen at

his side regarded him with a sort of terror. But the face of the old man was beautiful to look upon, so bright and strong was it amid those heavy brows and downcast eyes.

The simple burial service was soon finished, and the men and women stood about the graveyard in little groups, all watching the old man who still stood beside the grave, talking to himself now in low thrilling whispers.

'What is it he is saying?' said one.

'He is mad,' said another.

'Let us listen,' said a third.

So they crept closer to the old man, and the gulls cried louder overhead, wheeling like an army, conscious of some cause of great commotion.

And the old man said, 'Sons of my loins, draw near. You, Thomas, were the oldest, and you shall stand at her head; and you, Benjamin, my youngest, at her feet; Mary, little Mary, you shall stand with me, and Margaret on the other side.'

And the people said, 'He must be mad, for he is talking of his children as though they were alive, and they are long since dead.'

But the old man went on unheeding, 'Ah, Thomas, I mind me of the day when the sea took you, and did I not hear you thrice cry farewell at the window as

you passed? And Benjy, it was where strange trees grow, and the waters thunder round the smooth lagoon that you sunk, yet I knew it. For I saw the thing in the self-same hour; in the still night, as I tossed on the long swell by Pendragon Head, I looked into the water and saw it burn with sunshine, and you stretched stark beneath a palm, with your head lying on your arm, and thrice have I seen it since. And Mary and Margaret, you were but little children when you went, but often and often have I known you near me. Do 'ee mind the little doll ye loved an' quarrelled for as children, the doll wi' the broken arm I bought 'ee at Botallack fair? Every night, my dearies, I have put it in the bed where ye slept, and every morning, for two score of years, has the pillow been warm beside it, and I could see the place where your little heads had been. God's been wonderful kind to let you come so oft, but I've never seen ye, dearies, an' I'd like to see 'ee now. An' your mother's waiting for 'ee before she goes. She's wanting you to show her the way, maybe.'

And the people said again, 'He is surely mad, surely, surely.'

But one said, 'It is none so sure. Have ye not heard the wise folks say that the gulls know when there's a death, for they see the spirits of the dead,

and are troubled? And have ye not heard the grass make a sound as if feet passed along it in the dusk, and have ye never felt a wind go by, and maybe seen a light, like the fire that glimmers on the mast by night at sea?

And the people answered in a whisper, 'That is so; so the gossips told us round the fire at night.'

And the man who had already spoken, spoke again, and said, 'Old Reuben hath the second sight, that is what it is. And look you at the gulls, and tell me, if you can, what it is that troubles them?'

And it was clear that some strange commotion was at work among these children of the air. For first they cried incessantly to one another; and then they wheeled into two lines, and hung poised above the open grave; and one circled low, and, as he passed, his eye was seen very round and bright, and it seemed an eye of keen intelligence and scorn flashed upon these chattering groups of men and women near the grave.

The winter twilight was fast darkening now, but the old man still stood beside the grave. His lips yet murmured the names of Mary and of Margaret, of Thomas and of Benjy. At last he said joyously, 'Ah, they be all here. I know it, and thank the Lord

for it.' And he began to sing softly a hymn he had often sung in the little village chapel—

'For ever with the Lord,
Amen, so let it be ;
Life from the dead is in that word,
'Tis immortality.'

And although these very people had sung the same hymn themselves a hundred times, they shuddered as they heard it; for in the dusk it sounded weirdly like the voice of a spirit, and the gulls seemed to cry an echo overhead, and, indeed there was a sense of awe about the lonely figure of the man who tossed his hands and whispered in the dusk among the graves. So they were afraid and went away.

Then, as I looked into the heavenly crystal, I saw a thing strange and moving. For round these men and women who went away was a shadow, like a woven veil wound round each, so that they saw not beyond it; but this old man had no veil, and the whole world lay round him in essential brightness. Over the grey sea shone a light, and the gulls, ranged from left to right, hung, watching its approach with burning eyes. And the light grew, until it seemed the shape of a fair shell, hollowed like a flower, with tints of pearl and amethyst within its hollows, and it floated on the waters, slender as a leaf. And as it drew nearer, it

seemed a shallop built of silver light, with oars of gold. And behind its helm came two strong youths, one of whom had corals and deep-sea pearls about his throat, and the other the pink sea-weed of the English seas, delicate and exquisite of shape as lace. And beside the shallop, just beyond the sweep of the golden oars, ran and leapt two fair children, laughing as they came. And the white birds of the air, at some mystic sign, went out to meet the shallop, and flew in steady files on either side of it, their eyes shining like lights amid the dusk, and their wings outspread.

But when this strange procession reached the cliffs, behold, it soared over them, easily as a tinted globe of foam upon the wind, and then I saw what it meant. For earth had had its ingathering of the body, and heaven was now to know the ingathering of the spirit of this dead woman. For this faery thing of the sea stopped beside the grave, and what had been golden oars seemed now tall lights, such as men range beside the funeral bier. And the two young men stooped above the grave, and from the dreadful wooden thing within, a shape glided forth. And at first the shape was that of a grey, care-worn fisher-mother, with knotted hands of toil; but even while I looked, the tokens of the earthly faded, and

the shape grew like a flower, expanding, not slowly, leaf by leaf, but in an instant, as though a rose unfurled itself with one throb ; and the corruption had put on incorruption. And the mother stepped within the slender shining shallop ; and the two children took her hands in theirs and kissed them ; and the two strong sons kissed her on the brow, and then the magic thing melted silently away as it had come, and dwindled to a light upon the sea, and the gulls cried, and wheeled, and separated, and sank and lay like flakes of snow upon the shadowed sea.

But the old man stood long, staring into the night, and when he went away he sung softly to himself between the darkened hedge-rows,

‘For ever with the Lord,
Amen, so let it be ;
Life from the dead is in that word,
‘Tis immortality.’

And I said to my guide, ‘I know, and yet I know not. Tell me what this means?’

And he said, ‘All things are double, and every earthly thing has that which corresponds with it beyond the veil.’

‘And this strange sight?’ I said.

‘Is that which corresponds with the thing that happens on earth when men die. Here and there a

man sees the passing of the soul, as well as of the body. The old man beside the grave was one who saw both.'

'And yet they called the old man mad,' I murmured.

The Angel smiled, not in scorn but pity. 'It is ever the way of ignorance,' he replied. 'But such madness is, as it were, a wisdom beyond wisdom.'

VII

THE JUDGMENT OF THE WOMAN

Now as I walked in this strange land of vision there grew in me more and more a sense of uttermost unworthiness. For there quickened in my heart the memory of many evil things done long ago, and long forgotten, and I was as one who observes his flesh with care, fearful of the coming of the spot that proclaims him leper. To move thus amid all this holiness was an awful thing, for it was like moving in untempered light, which is for ever insupportable to man.

Moreover, it seemed to me that I had never known myself till now, and what I knew it seemed certain was already known throughout this place ; whereat I sighed and trembled, and with good cause. For, as one holds invisible writing to the fire, and behold all becomes clear and plain, so it seemed that all I had ever done and said was even such a writing traced upon the books of memory, and the books were

opened. No lightest word that was not recorded there, no flux of feeling that was not duly registered, no most secret act that did not stand displayed without disguise. And this was the dreadful thing, that Time itself was no more ; so that yesterday and to-day were one, and birth and death ran together, and the thing done long ago was as the thing done yesterday, the mind perceiving them as separate yet one, as though the whole play of life were transacted in an instant. And thus, rapid as the drama was, all that my lips had ever uttered was duly fitted in the dialogue, and every casual deed took its coherent and appointed place, each welded with each, like links in an invulnerable chain. For since Time was no more, it followed that sequences of conduct for which years had been needed, were now transacted in the beat of a single pulse, the mind receiving a thousand impressions at once, yet with no blurring of the outline, but rather with a new and fearful vividness and vehemence. As the man of science splits a moment into fractions, or a point into parts, yet is it but a moment or a part still, so now the life that once seemed to me so long was but as a moment, yet a moment of a thousand thousand parts, each part being at once separable and inseparable, and all alike distinct, coherent, and indelible.

So that all at once I covered my face, and wept, saying, 'Woe is me, for I am a sinful man.' And from some silver turret, far away a voice cried thrice, but in a tongue unknown to me; but I thought it was the voice my accusing angel, and wept the more.

Then at last my guide spoke and said, 'The hour is come when thou mayest look upon the Tablets of Judgment; come with me.'

A little before I had asked to see these tablets, but now great shame and dread had fallen on me. For who dare behold his life as it is? And who knew what the tablets would reveal? And I remembered the child's words, that the tablets cannot lie, and trembled.

But my guide said, 'It is not thine own life that thou art about to see, for that is not yet complete. For a space still undetermined of the Highest thou shalt yet live upon the earth; but it is given thee to see how other lives are judged, that thou mayest be strong and live thine own with better wisdom.'

So he took me by the hand, and bade me look up; for we had now passed out of the dark chambers where the vision of earth hangs reflected, and beyond the vestibule of the Wind, and stood beneath a vast arch, that was dark with excess of height. And he said, 'Knowest thou what this arch is?'

And I answered, 'I know not, but it is very terrible.'

And he said, 'This is the Arch of Fear. Beneath it pass all men to their judgment, nor is there one, however perfect, who can pass it without trembling. Look well at it.'

And I looked, and behold its shadow was flung far across the crystal pavement, like the shadow of a great mountain on a smiling land. At its base the arch seemed built of smoke, and higher up the smoke had deepened into the angry blue of thunder-clouds, and at the apex it was as solid ebony. And faces came and went within the smoke, which are the faces of the days and hours ; and eyes, sad or wistful or reproachful, shone out of it, like pale stars seen through driving mist : and the arch moaned within itself, like a thing alive and in pain. And then I knew why it was that I had wept and trembled, for the shadow of the Arch of Fear had fallen on me. Yet, as I looked, faint with terror, one thing I saw which strengthened me, for on the topmost round of this Arch of Fear ran a rainbow, and beneath it, outlined on those dreadful stones of darkness, was a Cross.

And while I gazed my guide led me onward, and we passed beneath it ; I treading delicately the while, as one who fears to wake an avalanche.

Now beyond the Arch are those innumerable houses to which the populations of the dead come, each to look upon the tablets which record his life, and to see this last solemn apocalypse of himself. And, as I looked, I saw again the woman of my dream, and she passed into a silent chamber, and we followed her. The place had no light, save a faint splendour as of the moon, which streamed from two tablets, set within the wall—the one of gold, and the other of silver, And the woman stood with clasped hands watching them.

First of all a film began to gather on the silver tablet, and then suddenly shapes began to grow ; and then, scene by scene, the woman's earthly life passed before her.

She, and we also, saw visions of narrow rooms and dismal streets ; of a pale-faced girl toiling with her needle, while Sin whispered at her ear and Hunger snatched the threads from her laborious patient hands and broke them. We saw her pass through black streets, with ever the same two stealthy shapes dogging every step, and pursuing her with insatiable malice. We saw her stop and weep above the great river where the many-lighted city glassed itself ; and now a child was on her breast, and she held her hand for alms, but no one gave unto her. And once

more Sin drew nigh, but when he would have struck her down, he could not for the child, whose tiny hands lay upon her heart and were her invisible defence. And so one by one the pictures came and went, the pictures of what she had been : and some were squalid, some were painful, all were miserable. For at the last she was clothed with rags, and lean with famine ; and her eyes were like spent fires, and she had no hope in life, and she was foul with the mire of poverty, and the knowledge of better things seemed quite gone out in her. Men pointed to her as a nameless thing, and all indignity was hers, and no one cared when the frozen morning light struck her with its steely arrows, as she lay dead upon the steps of a great church ; and no one missed her when her face was no more seen among the haunts of men.

But all this while other pictures were growing on the golden tablet, and whereas the pictures on the silver tablet grew faint and faded, those upon the golden tablet grew clear and lasted.

And first there was the picture of a child with face like the dawn, and the woman gazing on it, said softly, 'Was I ever like this?' And the pictures which had appeared on the silver tablet appeared here also ; but now they were like a film of shadow through which shone the better and the nobler

pictures. And though sometimes the film thickened, yet was the better picture never lost to sight, nor utterly obscured. And so it happened that though the same narrow room was here, yet was all different, and it was the stage of another drama.

And in one scene the girl stooped above her mother, who was old and bitter, and comforted her. When the mother took greedily the food she gave her without thanks, the girl said nothing, but smiled to see her mother eat ; and when the mother, conscious of some shadow of accusation in the girl's pale face, questioned her sharply, the girl lied nobly, and said she had had enough. And it had been so all through with her. With those coarsened hands of hers she had kept her mother till she died, and her husband later on till he died, and when these had gone, her children. She had failed in duty to none of these, and all wrong that she had done had been wrought upon herself. For this had been a woman capable of great love, nor had all the sordid misery of her life extinguished love in her. No one valued her, or thought the better of her for it ; but still she would not let love go. And as the pictures grew upon the golden mirror, this thing that was strange and beautiful to me came to pass ; ever the figure of the human creature in foul rags grew fainter, and the spiritual

figure with face like the dawn grew clearer. And at the last only this was left, for this was a woman in whom the Ideal had survived amid all the degradations of the Real; so that the shining figure in the golden mirror was but the reflection of the woman who herself stood watching it.

But the woman did not know this, and in her humility thought the figure on the tablet some other woman.

And she said softly, weeping the while, 'I do not understand, I know not what this means. Who is this fair creature in the mirror?' For the form in the mirror did not move, but hung there radiant, though the silver mirror was now quite blank again, and void.

Then a Voice of ineffable sweetness said, 'Woman, this is thyself, as thou didst mean to be, and art. Inasmuch as thou didst it to the least of these, thou didst do it unto Me!'

And the woman said doubtfully, 'I did mean to be good, indeed I did. But it was so hard. I did not know the way, and there was none to help.'

And again the Voice said, 'The way was easier found than thou didst know. Love is the way.'

And at the Voice a sound of far-off trumpets filled the air, and it seemed to me they hailed this

woman as one who had come up victor out of great tribulation.

But the woman fell upon her face, crying, 'I am not worthy, I am not worthy.'

'It is only Love that speaks thus,' said the Voice again. 'This is thy one merit, that thou hast loved, and God is love.'

And at that saying my heart moved in me, for I knew that it was the voice of Him who loved men unto death that spake. And I looked, and the Arch of Fear was gone; but the Rainbow and the Cross still hung suspended in the air. And the Rainbow broadened and deepened till it became a new arch-way, thronged with the faces of the blessed; and the Cross grew brighter, till it lit all the worlds. And this arch of rainbow was the Arch of Love; and beneath it the woman passed to her reward.

VIII

THE ARCH OF FEAR

AND while I gazed, behold the Arch began to change, and became once more the Arch of Fear. For it was as if a darkness oozed slowly from its base, and this ripple of darkness spread, ever mounting higher ; and whereas a moment since the Arch had flowered suddenly with the faces of the blessed, now a myriad doomed and angry faces shuddered in its depths, or trembled on its surface ; and the eyes of these dreadful creatures shone like restless stars upon the fronts of this immeasurable Arch. And the rainbow that touched the topmost round of the great Arch contracted and grew dim, till it was but a line of wavering fire ; and the cross shone faint, whelmed beneath this rising ripple of the darkness. And all these crowded faces were sad and lean and ill-favoured, and the eyes turned hither and thither in perpetual unrest, as if seeking something that could not be found.

And behold, two men drew near, clad in filthy raiment, and walking slowly as with shackled feet, and from time to time each looked upon the other, and fear and amazement were written on their brows. And where the flesh showed through their rags, behold it was green and leprous, and where the heart should have been in each there was no heart, but only a crawling nest of worms. Then I knew that though they moved and spoke, yet were they truly dead men, and that the life of the spirit in them had long since been wasted and forespent. But the gross flesh, by some strange compulsion of its elements, still moved, and was articulate; and the network of the nerves and veins was still there, as one sees the network of a dead leaf, but it was clad only in the vesture of decay; and a bitter ichor of corruption stagnated in the ducts of life, and the worms that died not moved in the pulseless citadel of being which had once been a beating heart. On their hands also there were crimson stains, and the lips which had kissed the mouth of sin were gone. - And it seemed as though their flesh knew that the proper hour of its dissolution had arrived, yet could it not dissolve; the flagrant dust being still held in mutinous coherence by the grip of some mystic law, working through all its members, and compelling that to live

which had no right to live, yet sought in vain the forfeited release of death.

Then the Angel said, 'Knowest thou these men?'

And I looked again, and behold, they were the two men I had seen who had mocked the beggar at the gateways of St. Clement Danes.

And the Angel said, 'To these men life gave its good things, yet were they not grateful. You do but see them now as they really were long before they came hither, for truly they were dead men while they seemed to live. For it is the spirit in man that is life, and as the spirit in man grows weak, the man dies; so that at the last it is but the empty shell of manhood that is left. Come with me that thou mayest see their judgment.'

And these two lipless creatures drew nigh, dragging their heavy feet, and entered into the House of the Tablets. And as they passed a cold wind and an odour of mortality went with them, whereat I shuddered.

As it had been with the woman, so it was now with them. For first the vacant silver tablet grew instinct with life, and they saw themselves as they had been. Only now there were voices speaking in the Tablet, and the sounds of human laughter, but

very shrill and faint, as if heard from the immeasurable distance.

And in one scene an old man lay dying, and called his son. But the son was in another room ransacking the old man's papers, and filling his hands with riches and gold, so that he did not hear. Then the old man raised himself in his lonely bed and listened, and heard the sound of rustling papers and of shut drawers, and his face grew pale and angry. At last, with a supreme effort, he tottered to his feet, and the life-blood gushed from his mouth, and stained his raiment as he moved across the room, and looked through an open door. And he sighed deeply, and said, 'Would I had died for thee, my son, before this day came. O Absalom, my son, my son! Couldst thou not watch with me one hour, nor wait one day, but must needs rob me ere yet my flesh is cold?'

But the son heard not, and the old man sunk upon the floor and died, and the tears stained his cheeks as he lay cold in death.

And in another scene the same youth sat amid his boon companions, when some one whispered at his ear, 'Margaret is dead. Her body has just been taken from the river.' But he hardened his face, and said boldly, 'I am not responsible. It is nothing to me.'

And yet it was his sin which had driven the girl to her miserable death. And the girl had those who loved her, and they stood broken-hearted by her grave, and her mother died of the shame of it—yet did not the man care nor feel.

And in each scene as it flashed upon the Tablet, the man himself was changed, and always for the worse. In boyhood his brow had been fair and broad, but now it grew ever narrower and baser; and his eyes had the craft in them of some impure wild beast, and his lips hung slack and sensual, and his flesh became more gross and cankered. And at first he knew the change, and was afraid. He had found the leper-spot in his flesh, and shuddered. But later on he did not see it, though the spot had spread, for he had shattered the mirror of the truth lest it should show him what he feared to see. So the monstrous evil grew, and the soul within him whimpered like a starved child, until at last he silenced it by one blow of unimaginable crime, and went boldly on the roads of darkness, equally without remorse or fear.

Now all this time the Golden Tablet hung quite blank and vacant. At first, indeed, a frail shape had moved in it, but it faded like a stain of breath, and at the last it came not at all. But the pictures in

the Silver Tablet came and went incessant, and each one baser and more cruel than the last.

And a Voice said sternly, 'Is there no good deed that this man hath done? Is there not one act of kindness, love, or mercy that may be laid to his charge? Purity he cast away, but had he no pity?'

And the man himself, constrained to speak, answered, 'None.'

'Tell me,' said the Voice again, 'did he never try to climb the steep pathway of his duty? All these years he lived, and the Higher thing was not unknown to him; did he never love it, even for a moment?'

And the man again replied, 'Never for a moment.'

And the Voice spake again and said, 'Think, was there no creature of the earth whom thou didst love?'

And at that word something stirred within the depths of the golden mirror, as though a wind passed over placid water, and the face of a little child appeared. It swam up like a flower from the mirror's depths—an infant's face, with closed eyes and tangled curls, and small hands doubled in the joy of sleep. And as the man looked, a change came over him, and where the nest of worms within his breast had been, a little flame burned softly, and the stagnant veins pulsed once more with a thrill of life.

And the man said, as though whispering to himself, 'It is so long ago, I half forget. I did not want the child, for he brought with him only a burden and a shame. Yet, when I saw him I think my heart was moved. If the child had lived, perhaps all things might have been different. Yes; I loved the child.'

And the Voice said, 'He who hath once known love, can never be wholly forsaken of Hope.'

But the man said sullenly, 'Let me be. Such as I am, I must remain. I have chosen; I abide by my choice, and am no coward. I do not wish it otherwise.'

'But God does,' said the Voice. 'O, creature fashioned by my hands, shall *my* work be in vain? Shall *I* stand by impotent and see my own work marred? Hast thou no thought of the toil wherewith I formed thee, fashioning part to part out of the dust of things; making the kingdom of the body with the soul for citadel, and a thousand nerves and veins for roads; building up the temple of the brain which thou hast desecrated, tempering bone and sinew for their appointed work, and filling all thy members with the spirit of life? Thou hast no thought of the "might-have-been," but shall I be careless too? If thou forgettest the pit from which thou wert dug, and would fain sink back into the slime again, shall I, the

Maker, forget? Shall I let thy soul be lost because thou carest not for it?

But the man said again, 'Let me be. I have no soul.' Yet now he spoke less sullenly, and there was a tremor in his voice.

'Thou hast a soul,' said the judging Voice. 'It is even now new-born in thee.'

And then a great horror fell upon the man, and he grovelled on his face and groaned. And it seemed to me that the leper spots upon him grew fainter, and the little flame within his breast waxed brighter, and a Presence stooped above him where he lay.

'Confess thou art justly judged, and behold Hope shall return to thee,' said the Voice.

And the man groaned, 'I confess. I am unclean, unclean. I hate and loathe myself. Give me back my soul, that I may try again!'

And the Voice said, 'Know this, it will be torment to thee. The soul must grow again in thee, and growth is pain. The light must be rekindled, and its flame will scorch thee as it grows.'

'Nevertheless, let me have my soul back,' cried the man. 'I sold it for nought, not knowing what I did.'

'It has been bought back by a Hand mightier than thine,' said the Voice.

And at that word the Arch of Fear began once

more to move and tremble, and the rainbow on its ridges broadened and deepened, and the Cross grew bright, and lit all the worlds. And it shone into the deep abyss of Hell, whither the man went, so that while he went into the outer darkness the light still travelled with him.

Then I saw that one called Judas met him as he went, and said to him, 'Be of good cheer, brother, thou shalt be made anew, even as I am.'

And the man said, 'Art thou Judas, he who sold the Lord?'

And he answered, 'Yea, I am even that Judas. But when I cast my soul away, Another found it, even the One to whom all souls belong, even Him whom I betrayed.'

And the man went on weeping, hand in hand with Judas, to that place where the souls of men are new-tempered in the fire of love.

IX

THE MAN WHO WAS LOVED

Now all this time the other man stood silent, and the shadows of great fear and perplexity passed across his face. For though this man resembled him who had now gone to his reward, yet was he different, since it is the will and method of the Maker in all things to fashion no two creatures perfectly alike, each being, as it were, a new experiment of the Divine art.

Now, as I looked upon this shameful creature, I remembered that it was the first man who had spoken cruelly to the beggar by the gateway of St. Clement Danes, but this man had only spoken lightly ; the one mocking at his misery, and the other only jesting ; and herein lay the difference between them. For the first had wrought ill upon the earth because he was ever hard of heart, but the other because he was weak, so that in all their long comradeship of evil, there was this distinction, that the

one had no compunction in his sins, but the other had many and grievous repentings. And looking yet again on this man, I perceived that there was in him something that the other lacked ; for, though his flesh also was green and leprous, as fully ripe in corruption, yet a faint light shone round it, like a ghostly aureole, or like the rounded edge of flame which lies beyond the black rim of an eclipse. And this faint light, obeying the shape of the man, was like a second man outlined behind the gross bulk of the first, as one sees a wizard moonlight tremble on the edges of a jutting crag of cloud. Moreover, this second shape waxed bright or waned as the man's thoughts came and went.

And the Angel said, 'Behold this man, and seeing him, behold that which concerns thyself. For all men have a second shape, which is the spiritual, and this shape grows or dwindles as the soul prospers or decays.'

Then I made reply, 'Is this second shape I see the man's spiritual self ?'

And the Angel answered, 'It is even so, and beholding it you discern what the Maker meant this man to be.'

Now, of all things strange and dreadful that I saw, this was strangest and most dreadful. It was as though one should take the bare bones and skeleton

of what once was human, and cast round them the ghostly outlines of a man, so that, seeing the anatomy of death, the eye also should discern in the same instant the assurance of life. For this thin shape of air rose above and went beyond the man ; the man's dreadful face being rimmed by another face that was majestic and benign, and the man's horrible corruption being included in the insubstantial outline of a form incorruptible and dignified, so that the man I saw seemed a cowardly, shameful creature, moving foully in the heart and centre of a heavenly splendour. And here a new thing happened ; for the Silver Tablet, as if tired of yielding up the secracies of sin, was covered in a black impenetrable haze, and on the Golden Tablet a faint fire ran and trembled, but took no form.

Then, all at once, a voice sprang on the air, so full of wail that it wrought trembling in the heart, and the man felt the shudder of it through all his members.

And the voice cried, 'O bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, heart of my heart, shall this thing be ?'

And a voice replied, 'Is there one that can speak for him ?'

And the first voice answered, 'Yea, and even die also.'

Then, all at once, a throng of voices shook the air ;

and one said, 'I am the Truth he betrayed ; how wilt thou answer me ?'

And a second, 'I am the Conscience he slew ; how answer me ?'

And a third, 'I am the Love he crucified, and how atone to me ?'

And high over all, there pierced another Voice, very still and terrible, and fulfilled of a scorn so great that it seemed even to scorn itself, saying, 'He is mine by a thousand vows and deeds, even mine alone ; and how shall he escape Me ?'

And, hearing this Voice, I knew that it was the Enemy of Souls who spake.

But the first wailing voice cried again, 'O bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, heart of my heart, shall this thing be ?'

And at that, both tablets kindled into simultaneous life, and quick as one picture appeared in the first, another answered it in the second. And in each this was the noticeable thing : that a Woman moved supreme and the Woman was the Mother of the man.

For, in brief, the man's earthly life had been this. A thousand times had he done wrong, yet never with the whole consent of his will, and of this the tablets told the tale. Moreover, while his mother lived, he who had been the curse of others was ever kind to

her, and the lips hot with the wine of sin grew cool and sacred as he kissed her brow. And of all that evil life which he had lived, she heard no faintest whisper ; and every day she prayed for him as for one who fought the good fight. Failing in righteousness and honour to all his fellows, yet was he loyal to her, and failed in no jot of tenderness of duty. Once, when public shame seized on him, he took elaborate precautions that she should never know, and being old and simple, and living far from the roar of cities, she never heard, but received him when he came back to her as though he were in truth what she supposed him—the knight-errant of God's good fight. And equally, when he lay ill in a distant city, he still wrote her letters describing how he prospered ; and when his means were gone, he still sent her money, so that no suspicion of the truth ever darkened her quiet life. Many evil folk came within his doors, and sat within his rooms ; but none ever saw her picture, for he had turned its face to the wall, in his superstitious fear lest she should see his shame. After she died, this dread grew stronger, so that at times the hair of his flesh stood up with the sense of her presence moving near him, and his vices became the more secret, and by so much the more shameful. But although his sins thickened with his years, yet this reverence for

his mother still kept a spot of tenderness within his heart; for in human nature many contradictions dwell, and thus this man who worshipped neither God nor truth, worshipped still his mother's memory, as one may bow before a human shrine who turns his back upon the high altar of eternal knowledge. And it was the voice of his mother that now sounded through the awful stillness, and shook his heart.

Again she cried, saying, 'Bone of my bone, wrought out of my sorrow and travail, come to me, that we may be at peace!'

But One said to her, as though trying her, 'He cannot come. Hast thou not thy heaven? Be still.'

Then she answered, 'What heaven have I without my son? Was not heaven empty even to the Maker until the well-beloved Son came back? Shall God have His Son and I have not mine? Is not mine also dear to me?'

But the voice replied, 'He is corrupt. Thou canst not have him.'

'Even though he be as the children of Rizpah,' she made reply, 'yet would I watch beside him while the dew of the eternal night falls, he and I, alone and near, in the great darkness!'

'Wouldst thou go with him whither he goes?' asked the voice.

'Yea, though I made my bed in hell,' she answered, 'whither he goeth, I will go, and where he lieth down in pain there shall be my pillow.'

'And thinkest thou, thou couldst fashion him afresh?' the voice inquired. 'Thou knowest not what he has become; thine eyes are holden that thou may'st not see. The soul has all but perished in him. There is but one tiny spark of light left, and the darkness is great.'

'The smoking flax shall not be quenched, nor the bruised reed broken,' she made reply. 'Once have I fashioned him in the travail of my body, yet again shall my soul travail in birth for him. What better task than this shall God assign, that even here I shall still be a mother, and yet again look upon the growing features of my son?'

'But it may be thou shalt die for him. The travail of his birth may be too sore for thee.'

'Motherhood thinks not of that,' she whispered. 'When did mother count her pains, or reckon them as greater than her hopes?'

The silence deepened, and it was as the silence of a great court in which a case is being judged. Then, as if making one last appeal, the mother cried, 'I have not asked bliss, and I renounce it. Let me pass into the realm of fire, if it be only there that I can meet

my son. When his hands are scorched, let me lay them in my bosom ; when the pain is great, let me be near to succour him. If darkness fall on him, let it also cover me. In his affliction let me be afflicted, and in his punishment let me be punished. Yea, have I not deserved it? Was it not some fault in me that grew to wickedness in him? Perchance I failed in care toward him: surely I must have failed if he be as thou sayest. Behold, Lord, I am guilty. I accuse myself. I claim to be cast out of heaven, as one unworthy. By the wall of darkness, at the utmost boundary of things, where the fires of bale burn, let me sit through all the ages Thou shalt appoint, that he may hear my voice through the night, as he did when a little child, and be comforted. O Lord, Almighty Father, Thou knowest what love is, and Thou knowest love cannot give up its own !'

Then the voice which had before spoken, as if trying her, said again, 'Knowest thou the horror of the place to which he goes? Knowest thou that there, amid the stones of fire and darkness, the dew falls only once in a thousand years, and only for a moment?'

And she answered, 'Yea, I have heard. But to these spirits in prison did not Christ go, that even they might be redeemed? Behold, amid the stones

of fire and darkness let me stand, and my tears shall be a dew of pity, falling cool upon the forehead of my son !'

'And what claim hast thou, that thou shouldst ask this thing ?'

'Even the claim of Love,' she answered. 'Can Love deny itself ?'

'And what claim has he ?'

'Even that he loved me. What he was to others I know not, but he was ever faithful son to me. Behold, he has slept upon my bosom, and my bosom aches for him. He is still my son, and I am still his mother.'

'Darest thou to look upon him ?'

'I dare,' she answered, 'for I shall see only the child that lay upon my knees. Give me my son, that I may take him to some place apart beyond the smile of God, where I may pray for him, and heal him of the bitter wounds that life hath given him. Some ask one thing for their Heaven, and some another : I ask this alone—not a place among the angels, but pain with him. Small reward dare I ask of God for anything of good that I have done on earth ; let Pain be that reward. Lo, I am content, I ask no better thing. Give me my son !'

And at those words a change, subtle and unspeakable, passed across the dreadful creature at my side.

That thin shape of air which rose above and went beyond the man grew more luminous ; that other shape fashioned in corruption dwindled and diminished, till it was but a dark unfeatured cloud moving shadow-like within the limits of a heavenly splendour. And the Golden Tablet now gave back an answering image of a youth with benign and quiet eyes, and brows that had the dignity of thought and love and purity, very faint indeed, yet clear ; for this was what the man had meant to be, and hence the clearness ; and age-long discipline must yet run its course before he could attain it, and hence the faintness of the image.

Then all other voices died away, leaving only that Voice of infinite sweetness which I had already heard, and the Voice said, ‘Great is thy faith, and according to thy faith, it shall be done unto thee. Woman, behold thy son ! Son, behold thy mother !’

And while I looked, one like unto her who sorrowed at the Cross appeared, and stood beside the man ; and the soft waves of light flowing from her presence seemed to compass and enfold the man, so that he and she were one ; and slowly both vanished, withdrawn into the Infinite, and going whither I know not.

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THE LAND OF THE LONELY

AFTER these things a great stillness fell on my soul, for in all that I had seen had been cause not alone for wonder but for joy. For I had seen how near Heaven lay to earth, which is a thing inconceivable to most men, and dimly imagined only by the wisest; I had also beheld the poor rewarded, and yet not above measure; and the wicked judged, yet not unjustly. But one thing I was yet to see, and that was that Love was All in All.

Now at the farthest boundary of the House of Dreams begins the Abyss of Things, and it was thither my Guide conducted me. It is from this point that the City of God is seen, rising in interminable ranges, tier on tier, of infinite domes and spires, yet all insubstantial as though it floated in mid-air. For this is indeed a city of many mansions, whose twelve gates, each a precious stone, are not

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shut at all ; for each gate crowns an avenue of life, stretching far into the maze of worlds ; and on these roads of life is an infinite coming and going of those who gather from all the worlds. The city itself is thus the centre of a vast wheel of light, whose spokes are the roads radiating from the twelve gates, and whose circumference is unknown. And this living wheel of worlds revolves for evermore, for all created things have their centre and their orbit, and the centre of all things is God. And the centre is the Centre of Repose, wherein the City of God stands ; and when a world is first fashioned it revolves at the farthest distance from the centre, but as it ever grows more perfect and its uses are accomplished, it revolves upon a circle nearer God, till last of all it sinks into the centre, and finds repose. Thus will it be with the earth, when all is done ; it will merge back again into God from whom it came. And whereas a wheel at the very height of motion seems still, so these galaxies of worlds seem not to move at all ; and thus the stillness of God Himself is the peace of perfect action.

Again I saw that as the Light of God is the light of all the worlds, so the love of God is a light caught up and reflected back by all that He has made ; no humblest creature in the humblest world

that He has made not flinging back some tiny ray of splendour when it loves its mate or suffers for its fellow. And as the worlds draw ever nearer to the Centre of Repose, so each creature draws near to God by love; and thus Love is the living light and bond of all things.

And yet again, as all things revolve round God, so each creature He has made revolves round some other creature, as double stars revolve round one another, and yet both obey the larger orbit of the sun. For the souls of men and women are twin, and each soul moves in the orbit of some other soul. And the unrest of human creatures is the restlessness of those ever seeking for the soul which completes their own, and the joy of love is this completion. So that, in a sense, they also find the Centre of Repose who love, because they henceforth share a common orbit, and they who find not love move upon a lonely track, as do the new-made worlds that have not yet found their uses, and are far from God.

Then the Angel said, 'Understandest thou the law of love?'

And I replied, 'I think I understand, but it is dimly.'

And he said, 'Remember'st thou not thy son, and how a fair maiden sprang from the flower he held?

This was the twin soul of his own. He found it not on earth, for his earthly life was brief: but it waited for him here!'

And I looked, and behold a field of flowers, among which walked my son, and she who had sprung flower-like from a flower. And they walked together as children, hand-in-hand, divinely innocent. And as one sees a light through a vase of alabaster, even thus the soul shone in each, with the measure of an equal radiance, so that when the flame quickened in her it quickened in him also, the rise and fall of the flame being the beating of the pulse of love.

Then I said, 'Do all those who have lived together on the earth find each other here?'

And he replied, 'Not always. It is only as they have loved. It is only when their souls have been as one soul.'

And I inquired, 'What happens then to those who have lived together but not loved? For, alas, such things are on the earth, where men and women choose each other wrongly, and grow weary of each other, and fail in duty each toward each?'

And he replied, 'Thou shalt see.'

Now if one could stand upon a vast white cloud, and let the eye plunge over its smooth steep sides into infinity, so the Angel bade me stand upon a



buttress of the heavenly world which was at the border of the great Abyss of Things. At first I saw nothing but a dreadful slope of cloud curving over into nothingness ; then I saw that at its base the cloud was flattened out and riven, and in the rift lay a lonesome land, like a valley wedged between inaccessible and silent hills. As one hears the wailful cry of some solitary bird in such a valley, so a voice of moaning filled this lonesome land, as of creatures full of questioning and discontent, and their cry was very bitter. And looking yet again, I saw the creatures of this doleful place move to and fro, with pale faces and wrung hands. Each went alone, yet each looked on each with questioning eyes, and when they met they shuddered at each other, and cried out afresh. One held jewels in his hand, offering them in turn to each shape he met, but none would take them ; and another a crown of gold, but none would wear it. And some who dwelt in dismal caves, appeared to think them palaces ; for they brought one and another after long persuasion to look at them, and seemed wonder-struck when these shapes looked once, and turned aside with bitterest disdain. And some stood beside fine tables set with gold and silver as for a feast, and besought one and another to tarry with them ; but none gave them

heed; so that from morn till night they stood like those who huckster wares which no man needs; and when at night-fall they ate of their own feast, the food turned to ashes in their mouths. And in all this they seemed to me like children who play some foolish game, yet withal are very sad.

Then I said, 'Who are these strange people, and what is it that they do?'

And the Angel said, 'We will draw near that thou mayest see.'

Now, behold, as I drew near, I perceived that I had passed into the deep shadow cast by the buttresses of heaven, and this shadow lay on all the land. The air also was heavy and accursed, and the wind of pain was ever crying in the iron hills, and the River of Regret ran through the flowerless plains.

At the entrance to the place towered an Arch of Ice, and this is fashioned of the tears of those who die for lack of love; and the tears of the unloved, continually falling, and freezing as they fall, add ever to the monstrous height and bulk of the accursed thing. For this is the land of Everlasting Cold, where the loveless dwell, and the cold is as a fire more keen than fire. And beside this Arch of Ice stood two creatures on whose eyelids lay the

shadow of death, and on whose cheeks the tears were rusted, so that they were like stains of blood, and these are named Desolation and Destruction, and their fleshless hands hold the keys of this abode of sorrow.

Now it came to pass as we entered the place, a clamour of voices filled the air, and many men and women came running towards us and all cried one thing, saying, 'Art thou Love that hath come at last?' And straightway each began to offer us his gift; the man with the jewels saying, 'None can give thee more than this, therefore come with me'; and the man with the crown crying, 'This is more, therefore come with me.' And then the meaning of the thing that I had seen grew clear, for I perceived that all these men thought that love could be bought with gifts, and this was all they knew of love. For he with the jewels had been a rich man on earth, and he with the crown a king; and each had bought the vanity and pride of women with his gold, yet had never found the love that peasants know. And it seemed they knew no better now; for each sought still to purchase that which can be given, but never bought; yet was there this difference, that the pain of emptiness they had never felt on earth, they felt now; and they longed now for that which they had once

despised. For as the loneliness and horror of this desolate place grew upon them, each slowly came to see that he needed love, and by love only could he be delivered ; yet so slowly did this knowledge come, that they still acted as they did on earth, endeavouring to bribe each other and to buy love from one another at a great price of gold. For of all pains, loneliness is worst, and these sad-eyed creatures were ever lonely, and the very name of their abode was the Vale of Loneliness.

Then I said, 'Better the Fire than the Cold. Surely in all that I have seen has nothing been so horrible as this. Is there no deliverance for these ?'

And the Angel answered, 'Yea, they are not forgotten though they forget. So soon as they see that Love is all in all, Love is near them. Some know this quickly, and are delivered ; others only at the end of many years. Behold, thou shalt see even this thing also.'

And straightway, as the Angel spake, we were caught upon a great wind, and stood in a place far away, and very desolate. Between the stiff sedge a frozen river glimmered, and the trees had blossoms of blue ice ; and black peaks, sharp as spears, pierced the sombre sky. And lo, as long since the bell of the

leper rang in the woods, so now a mournful voice rose and fell upon the accursed air, and one came towards us weeping as he came. And he cried, 'Woe is me, for I am become a companion of dragons, and my food is dust. Come, see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, even mine. Love I might have known, but Love I scorned. Yea, I have heard the cry of Love in the night, and the feet of Love at my doorways, and I opened not the door. But I hardened yet my heart, and said, "It is nought, gold is better; pride and power are better; love is the fantasy of fools." So I dwelt loveless in my house of gold, and died loveless on my bed of silk, alone in my pride of heart and emptiness of soul. And now the loneliness I chose is become my portion, and it is a punishment greater than I can bear. Come, see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, even mine!'

The voice rose and fell, mournful and complaining, like the bell of the leper in a lonely place; and ever as the man drew nigh, he cast from him gold and jewels, and, at last, even his raiment, till he stood lean and naked, and I saw the heart beating in his breast, and in the heart an arrow of ice.

Then suddenly One drew near him, whose heart was cleft in twain, and on Whose brow were thorns, and He said, 'I am Love, what is it thou dost ask?'

And the man replied, 'Love, only love, that I may be alone no more.'

'Love is sorrow,' said the Voice; 'it wears thorns, it is hated and despised; it has even been crucified. Is it this Love thou dost ask?'

And the man answered, 'Even this.'

Then the Voice said again, 'Wouldst thou tread the roads of Hell with Love?'

And the man said, 'Yea, with Love. For one is there against whom I sinned; it may be I may find her; perhaps even I may suffer in her stead.'

Then He who had spoken stooped above the man, saying softly, 'Thou shalt; I go even now to find my sheep in the fields of fire. Wilt thou come?'

And the man cried joyously, 'O that I might!'

Then the One who spake with him said, 'Give Me thy heart!' And He thrust his hand into the man's breast, and drew forth his heart with the arrow of ice transfixing it; and He put it into the cleft of His own heart for a moment, and then gave it back to the man. And behold the arrow of ice was melted; and in the same instant the river ran free, and the blossoms of ice upon the trees became flowers of life, on which a cross appeared, and a soft wind sang amid the sedges.

For the Christ had smiled, and His smile brought

summer to the Land of Loneliness ; and a sudden sunlight filled the land.

So the man passed for ever out of the Land of Loneliness, hand in hand with Him whose name is Love ; and among the crags of iron whither they went, the trumpets sang their '*Alleluia*' and were still.

THE BRIDGE OF HELL

As one sleeps and dreams, yet is half aware of daylight shining on his bed, and knows his dream is passing from him, so now I began to know that my vision neared its close. The voices that had spoken sounded thinner in my ear, and a soft mist was dropping like a veil upon the things I saw. And as one who drowns sinks slowly in the sea, and sees the sun and clouds rush from him, so I knew the waters of Time once more engulfing me, and my whole mind struggled in an agony against them.

Now I felt within myself one doubt unresolved, yet knew not what it was; and some one vision desired, yet denied and unattained. All that I had seen seemed as nothing worth, unless I saw this also; yet I could not tell what it was I wished to see. A sound, as of marching feet in a great darkness, filled my ear, and it was as if a host passed by; and a

spirit passed before my eyes, but I could not discern the form thereof. And there was silence and a sense of fear, for the face that moved near mine was featureless, the eyes alone shining like dim wells of light, and the breath of a thing that lived passing over me. My mind went out to it, yet it came no nearer ; with infinite labour of the will I sought it, yet it eluded me, so that dread and trembling came upon me. For it seemed the face would speak, and that the wisdom of eternity hung upon its lips ; yet it could not speak ; and that I had waited since the first moment of eternity to listen, yet I could not hear. So I cried aloud, and the thing went from me, and I stood again by the crags of iron in the Vale of Loneliness, and beheld with joy my guide yet with me.

Then my guide took me by the hand, and we passed into a terrible ravine of the iron hills, overhung with toppling crags and vast slanting towers and pinnacles, that seemed suspended by a hair. And, as we went, that sound of marching feet, passing in innumerable files, again was heard, and a clang of iron upon iron, as of a thousand strokes falling in a steady rhythm on a thousand anvils. And the thing which had been featureless seemed nearer, walking stride by stride with us, yet without a footfall, and in the gloom its eyes, like wells of light, burned faint.

Then I said, 'What Shape is this that goes with us?'

And my Guide replied, 'He is Labour, and thou goest to the judgment of the Workers.'

Then my eyes were opened, and I saw once more the man who had stood beside the railings of St. Clement Danes, offering unwelcome wares in his swollen roughened hands. His brow was deeply seamed, and the muscles of his body were like knotted steel; sweat and grime defiled him, and his flesh was scarred ; yet was there something noble in his mighty bulk, and the dull patience of his face made me marvel, for marred though the brow was, yet was it majestic. Upon his back were slung the weapons of his toil, and the very hills seemed to know him, as their conqueror. For upon such peaks as these this man had moved in weariness and hunger, and in their depths he had cut the path which the vulture's eye hath not seen, nor the lion's whelp trodden. With the muscles of his hand he had overturned the mountains, and grappled with the stones of darkness, and bound the waterfloods from overflowing. His voice had cried to the live lightning, 'Come,' and it came, and behold it was as some bright and dreadful creature of the forest, tamed to human uses, and lying at his feet with glittering obedient eyes. The

wind had called him brother, and to him had the blind and turbulent ocean been submissive. Time, looking on the works which he had wrought, wondered, and before them the spirit of Havoc had stood still and was dismayed. Yet had this man, before whom the depths were stirred, moved among his fellows in coarse raiment and with humble feet, eating frugal bread and dwelling beneath mean roofs of populous poverty, unconsidered and contemned, and having no beauty that men should desire him.

Now, as we went, the way grew ever narrower and the air darker, until at last we came to a place where two monstrous gates of iron towered into the sky, and beside them stood two great angels. And straight-way the angels began to talk with the man.

And one said, 'Who art thou?'

And he replied, 'I am a worker.'

'Tell us of thine earthly life,' they said.

And the man replied, 'There is nothing to be told, I was but one among a multitude. I rose in the chill of dawn, went out, toiled through many hours, and came back to sleep. The frosts pierced me, the rains smote upon me; yet was there joy in it all, for the work of my hands stood fast. One day of the week I rested, and then I slept from morn till night, for I was weary. One dwelt with me; many-childed,

labour-spent was she, and her I loved. The children of my loins grew up, but they were as strange children, for I saw them only for a little on the one day, and then, being bone-weary and heavy of eye, I slept. That was my life.'

'Didst thou ever look beyond the earth, or hear of what men have written in books of that beyond?'

'I had no time. Moreover, I could not read nor write.'

'Didst thou never pray?'

'Ay, often. When the ship went down and the black water spued me out; when the bead of fire leapt along the fuse, and the mine thundered in, then I called on God. But I could not pray in churches. The air choked me; and besides, I felt no need.'

'Hast thou done ought of good in thy earthly life?'

'I built well—that was good. The trains rush upon the ways I made—the road holds fast. The rivets of the bridge I built are firm, and the floods rage about its base in vain. When the trains roar past my rivets cry to one another, "Hold fast, brothers, the shock comes," and something in me feels their jar and ring, and triumphs.'

'But didst thou do no good to thy fellow, no act that made thee think of him before thyself?'

'As such things happen, I did them. Among men such as I am, other things beside cold and heat are shared.'

'Let me see thine hand,' said the Angel.

But at that word the man thrust his hand behind him, and stood shamefast.

'Nevertheless let me see it,' said the Angel, speaking very softly.

The man held out his huge hand, blushing like a child. It was gnarled and knotted like a lump of oak. A great scar ran across it, and it was broken at the wrist.

'How came this?' said the Angel.

'It was nothing,' said the man. 'One of us had to go when the crash came, and t'other chap was young, and kept his mother. I couldn't let him die, not if I knew it. The best hour I ever knew was when I lay there smashed, and heard that he was safe. But it's not worth talking of—he'd ha' done the same for me.'

At that word the vast gates of iron began to move, and a strange music broke from their hinges as they turned. And behold, beyond them, rose the vision of a city wonderful to see ; for a thousand aqueducts and arches hung in mid-air, and dome rose above dome, and parapet above parapet ; and against this

blue limit of things scaffoldings were swung, gleaming with many lights, and a forest of poles like inter-tangled spars of crystal ; so that I knew that this was one of God's cities that was still being built. And the man's eyes shone as he looked, for he had never seen building such as this, and the passion of work cried in his heart. 'That is where I would be,' he said. 'It was hard to find work down below of late ; but I see there 's plenty of work to be had here. And I think I see my boys upon those shining scaffolds !'

And the angel said, 'Pass in ; God's joy is work, and enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. The Maker calls thee.'

And the man, wondering much, passed on, and the gates were shut.

Now, all this while, the sound of those thousand hammers striking on those thousand anvils had not ceased, and there was something desolate and melancholy in the sound. And while I yet wondered whence the sound came, I saw a narrow path climbing to the topmost crag, and my guide bade me follow it. And, as we went, a sullen glare burned behind the crags, and the sound came nearer. At last we stood upon a high ridge, and the glare beat in our eyes ; and far below yawned a land unknown.

Yet was it no land, for it was void and formless,

like a pit of darkness, and over it sprang immense a bridge of fire. And this is the Bridge of Hell.

Now, if one should see a rainbow flung across the velvet blackness of a starless sky, and if this rainbow hung incomplete, being but two-thirds of a perfect bow, even so was this bridge, save that it had no colour but the glow of solid flame. And on this bridge, myriads of creatures toiled, beating and hammering the blocks of flame as if they had been stone, and pushing them hither and thither with the strain of tense sinews, and cementing them into place with the sweat of fire that fell from them. So the hammered plates and blocks of flame were welded each in each, and on the growing arch a crowd of beings stood, small as ants upon the snow-slope of a mountain, for the arch was vaster than the vastest mountain. And as the bridge grew the light grew also, and they rejoiced because they saw far off a land of rest, which they would only reach when their heavy toil was done.

Then I said, 'Who are these, and what dreadful work is this wherein they toil ?'

And my guide answered, 'These are the idle. Upon the earth they toiled not, neither did they spin. They took no share in the infinite labour of things. The burden meant for them was carried by another,

and they slept while others wrought for them. They knew not the blessedness of effort, nor found the efficacy which it brings. So the flesh and heart grew gross, and the soul diseased.'

'Hitherto, in all that I have seen, I have seen mercy,' I said, 'but here I find no mercy.'

'Is not this also mercy which teaches men that life means energy?' he asked. 'If for the Maker Himself eternity means toil, how shall man stand in the presence of the Maker with idle hands? Behold, these whom thou seest ask no pity; they learn the joy of effort, and as they work, they work out their salvation.'

Even as he spoke, the span of the Bridge of Hell grew complete and touched the fringes of the Land of Rest, and a multitude of souls passed over, singing as they went. No longer would they work upon the Bridge of Hell, but on that fair city of God which was yet being built. From the topmost scaffolds of that distant city many voices cried, 'Enter thou into the joy of the Lord;' and so I knew that the joy of God is perfect labour, and that in nowise can the toiler fail of his reward.

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THE THRONE OF THE HIGHEST

EVEN as my guide spoke a wave of air moved beneath my feet, and I was far away. For I had seen the depths, and finally, I was to see the heights; I had groped among the roots of things that lie among the darkness, and I was now to look upon the golden fruit that shakes upon the topmost boughs of Heaven.

High above all height pierced the silver spire of the centremost Heaven whereon we stood, from which all worlds are seen. And as the eagle on his crag sees the winding of the river from its sources to the sea, or as the man placed high above the battle beholds the ordering of things, and the due movement of obedient hosts, so now I saw the Beginning and the End, yet not as two things, but as one, not as distant from each other, but the same. For all earthly error lies in this, that men see in part

only ; beholding causes but not foreseeing effects, and effects but separated from their causes ; watching the fashioning of the thread, but never guessing at the finished fabric ; or at most, seeing the ragged outlines of design upon the fabric, but in no case the whole symmetry of the completed work.

But in this Heaven of the Centremost, Time is no more, and thus between cause and effect there is no interval. For in things which are the most immediate upon the earth there is a certain space to be traversed between cause and effect, even the flying bullet buffeting back the waves of air as it passes to its mark ; but here the Perfect Will touches the Perfect Result in the same instant, and no element of opposition yawns between them. When God speaks, it is done, and for Him, and those whom He shall call to the Heaven of the Centremost, the Beginning and the End are one. Thus it is as if the artist sees his conception, and the perfect canvas which expresses it, in the flash of the self-same instant ; and the campaign of the warrior is won before it is fought ; and the struggle of the martyr and his crown lie in the compass of the self-same moment. Thus are all things fore-ordained and fore-determined, since for a thing to be at all, is for it to be perfectly. And, behold, before this knowledge my mind fainted, for it was a

knowledge too high and wonderful for the sons of men.

Then my guide took me by the hand and raised me up, saying, 'Hearest thou anything?' And, listening, I heard a low music, like a wind that breathed round the spire of silver, and it said, 'I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End!' And the whole round of the universe whispered 'He is from everlasting to everlasting,' as a shell murmurs with the undying voices of the sea.

And the procession of the Worlds passed, but it seemed their shape was changed; for each bore the aspect of a Cross, so that it was as if they all climbed the steep walls of the abyss to some far-off hidden Calvary.

And the procession of the Sons of God passed, and these too, each with wings outspread, seemed living Crosses.

And the procession of the Sons of Men passed, and each bore the five wounds of the Cross, and on each brow was a crown of thorns which flowered with flowers of light.

And the procession of the Prisoners of Hell passed, and they also wore the crown of thorns, only that the flowers were still unbudded, and their crowns were dark.

And after these came the Vision of thrones and principalities, and powers, and hierarchies, and dominions, and each was shaped after the similitude of a cross. And Heaven itself, lying at my feet, was built crosswise, and the spire of silver whereupon I stood, was, as it were, the sharpest spike within an immeasurable crown of Thorn. And I bowed my head, not daring to look any more, and my heart was melted in me.

Then my guide said, 'Thou hast beheld the final vision which is the reconciliation of all things.'

But I made no reply, being overcome with awe.

And he said, as one who speaks low, overburdened with the weight of wisdom, 'This is the vision and this the interpretation thereof. The Cross is the symbol of infinite pain; for as light cannot exist without shadow, so joy cannot exist without pain. All things suffer in order that they may enjoy. The Maker also suffers, since in Him both joy and pain are perfected.'

But the saying was too high and wonderful for me, and I understood it not.

Then he said again, as though chiding me, and all the race of men in me, 'O foolishness of man, which hath ever pictured God as impassive and beyond pain, sitting at ease in the sunlit heavens while His

creatures suffer, behold even this and be instructed. Is there aught brought to birth without pain? Is not love pain, yet is it not a pain which the meanest creature will endure, and endure with gladness? Can he who is a father, she who is a mother, take the joy of children without taking the burden too? And can God create without pain, can He redeem and love without it? It might have been, since all things might have been, that God had chosen sterile bliss, but this He would not choose. With His own hands He made His Throne a Cross, by His own will He laid Himself upon it. In the temple, which no creature can behold, God Himself hangs crucified, redeeming all things, and even Himself, by His eternal agony.'

'I thought——' I said; and then I stammered; I was dumb.

'Tell me thy thoughts. Be not afraid. What is it that men think of these things?'

And I replied, 'They hate pain. They see in it only something harsh and merciless. And they see only in the Cross the accidental form of gibbet invented by a cruel nation, the thing on which love was crucified that all men might learn the bitter impotence of love, and the eternal strength of hate.'

'O fools and slow of heart,' he answered. 'Would

the Christ whose story men have read have ever touched the heart of the world if He had not died? Would the lonely and forsaken have ever found comradeship in Him, had He not also been lonely and forsaken? And behold the Cross itself is something written in the heavens by the stars. They who found it, they who fashioned it for a rood of shame, did but discover the symbol of the universe. They took it, not knowing what it was, but some instinct made them use it as the altar for the sacrifice of pain. They took it, and still unknowing, made it the throne of God.'

And lo, as He spoke, a Wind and a Pulse shook all the place, and the worlds stood still, and all the great processional arrays of men and angels, heaped rank on rank beyond all numbering, were silent as a field of lilies on a mountain side. But I covered my eyes in a very ecstasy and sacredness of awe.

Then he said, 'Thou shalt see even this also, though it be a vision unlawful for a man to see, whose toil on earth is not yet ended.'

And I said, 'Take me by the hand; I faint. Tell me what it is thou wouldest have me see.'

And he answered, 'Once only, as the Will shall will it, at long intervals, can this vision be seen. It is the Vision of the Throne of God.'

Even as he spake a dreadful splendour spread through all the worlds, as when the sun rises on an unboundaried sea. Twice it shone, as of a wheel of flame revolving; then there was so great a silence that I could hear the breath come and go in the disparted lips of all those great arrays of living creatures. And the Wind cried, 'Behold, it comes.' And the Pulse of Life, running through all those towers and walls of the City of Heaven, whispered, 'It comes.' And all the universe, shuddering with an awful joy, said, 'It comes !'

At last it came, The Vision of the Throne of God. An infinite brightness cut the air like a sword, an infinite darkness followed it. Then the darkness cleared for one brief instant; a Throne built of the living forms of angels and archangels swam upon the air; and the Throne, changing shape, became a Cross, and on the Cross hung one who suffered, so that in the very midst of the Throne was seen the newly slain. And the angels and the archangels of the Throne cried softly, 'Holy, holy, holy'; and all the Crosses, of all these worlds and peoples, of all these principalities and powers, and hierarchies and dominions, bowed and worshipped.

Even as the manifold golden ears of corn bend all one way, or as a thousand thousand lights flare

together on the wind, so they stooped toward God.

And the very depths were opened, so that they who dwelt in Hell saw Him whom they had pierced, and a great cry was on their lips, and they worshipped. They, even they, saw the Throne of the Highest that it was a Cross, and they saw the awful face of Him who hung thereon, and His eyes rested on them. And His lips said, 'I thirst,' and they knew that it was for their love He thirsted; and from His eyes fell one tear, and the fires of Hell sank quenched.

And, like a dew, the softness of that tear fell also on the earth, and men's hearts were made tender each toward each. They sorrowed no more as those without hope, and endured no more as those without comfort: for they knew that the Highest also sorrowed and endured, and their hearts grew strong, even while they were pierced with the pangs of grief, and bruised in the wine-press of affliction.

So all the gathered universe stood at gaze, far ranged about the Maker, and in the deep hush waited for a word. And the lips of Him upon the Throne that was a Cross moved twice, but made no sound, or so it seemed to me. But the universe had heard, and a murmur like the diapason of the sea, ran

through all the worlds. And it was as though the stars sang together, and the sons of God rejoiced.

And yet again the lips of Him upon the Throne that was a Cross spake, and this time I heard. And He said, 'It is finished.'

Then, scarce daring to breathe, I whispered, 'What is finished ?'

And my guide said, 'It is the Dream of God. The Maker dreams of the Hour when all creatures shall love Him, even as He hath loved them, and given Himself for them. And since with Him the Beginning is the End, He beholds already as accomplished that which is yet to be. Yea, surely it shall be, it is even now.'

And the thrones and dominions cried, *Amen*. And all the worlds cried *Amen*. And all the living walls of Heaven cried *Amen*. *So be it. As it was in the beginning, it is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.*

Then I too would have bowed and worshipped, but instantly a soft veil was drawn across my eyes, and a strong Hand grasped mine.

All was fading—all, all was gone.

A wave of light sprang beneath my feet, and on it stood my Child. The Child waved his hand to me

and smiled. I knew myself sinking, falling ; a huge shadow fell upon the wave of light, which was the shadow of the earth. Something dark and starred with intricate and tangled ropes of fire lay far below —it was the mighty city. A ship tossed upon the moonlit sea, a mountain raised its peak of crystal. A great hum of men, like the noise of winds along the shore-line of a continent, broke upon my ears. A sower went forth to sow ; the birds sang above the furrowed earth, and a smell of spring was in the air. The familiar sun burned along the levels of the sea, and the winds ran east and west blowing the clarions of the Day.

So I awoke, and behold the bells of all the cities of the earth rang with the music of the Easter-morning.

EPILOGUE

THE name of Cyril Reade, which appears in the Prologue of this brief history, must also conclude it.

It happened that, for various reasons, I did not see my friend again for nearly a month after this memorable Easter-day. When I met him I was struck by the alteration in his appearance. It needed no very experienced eye to discover that he had not long to live. The lines upon his brow had deepened, the temples were hollowed out, the eyelids were heavy; age seemed to have overtaken him at a stride.

But even more remarkable than any outward change, was the change that had happened to the texture of his thoughts. In the old days we had rarely met without argument; now the whole man seemed softened and docile to an incredible degree. His interest in the world had manifestly passed away. His books and papers lay around him unread. He would sit for hours in perfect quiet as if lost in

thought; and, at times astonishment and curiosity so keen that they pained and startled the onlooker, flashed from his brooding eyes. Reticent he had always been, but this absolute silence into which he had sunk, was a thing abnormal and intolerably sad.

Once only, in the last week of his life, did he make a brief attempt to break this silence. It was a beautiful night in June, and he was lying in bed, propped up with pillows. The windows of his room were open, and the rustling of the trees in the night air, and the hum of the crowded streets that lay beyond the square, came into the room in gusts of sound. The lamp was not yet lit; a pale green light from the west yet suffused the sky. I sat beside the window watching the soft gradations, as they melted from mauve to violet, and then into pearly grey; and I believe that I was busy contrasting in my thoughts the flare of the city which lit the lower sky with the quiet stars which had begun to appear in the upper heavens, when suddenly Cyril spoke.

'Don't move,' he said. 'Sit down where you are, and don't light the lamp yet. I want to ask you something. Do you ever dream?'

'Sometimes,' I said.

'Have you ever dreamed something so vivid and remarkable that it has altered your ideas of things?'

'Once,' I answered.

'Do you mind telling me *when* you dreamed like that?'

'On Easter-eve,' I said, in a low voice.

'Ah!' he said in a tone so keen that it rang like a harp-string through the room.

He did not speak again for some time. When he did, he began to talk in a whispered monologue. At first I did not catch the words: then I heard him say, 'Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.' This he said many times, and in a tone of awestruck wonder. Then he added, still whispering to himself, 'Incredible, yet perhaps true. For all things are numbered. The thousandth part of an inch, the fraction of a second, the incredibly minute vibrations of the air . . . man has found a way of numbering that which seemed numberless, and of taking account of that which seemed beyond counting. All things are numbered . . . it is a knowledge too wonderful for me. Yet why not the hairs of the head as truly as the vibrations of the light and the pulses of the air? No chaos . . . order everywhere . . . nothing overlooked, nothing forgotten . . . the large and small both alike to Him who is the First and the Last. My God, my God, if this be true. . . !'

He broke off suddenly, hiding his face in his hands.

As for me, a nameless awe possessed me. Could it be that Cyril Reade had dreamed the same dream that I had dreamed? Could it be that on that Easter-eve the same vision had happened to us both? I dared not ask the question. Nor had I any need, for an hour later Cyril had, in a manner, answered it.

'I know where you were on Easter-eve,' he said, as we parted. 'I see it all in your eyes. I was there too. It is something not to be spoken of. For me the great mystery is very near solution, and be sure of this, I shall die with too much of hope to know anything of fear. There, there,' he added, as he saw the tears upon my face, 'don't grieve ;

"And what is life that we should moan,
Why make we such ado?"

This proved to be my last parting with Cyril Reade. Two days later, in the grey dawn, a messenger came to my house, saying he was dead. I give these facts for what they are worth. For my part, I believe that the Supreme Will must have permitted us each, at the same moment of time, to look upon the same vision. There can be no doubt of the great change that had passed over my friend. It was manifest that something had happened to him which had

resulted in a total uprooting of all his thoughts. The words of his which I have quoted declare this; and beyond them, there is the curious evidence of a poem found beneath his pillow after death. It appears that he had written it, a verse at a time, very slowly during the long hours of sickness, and it expresses his final views in life. I subjoin the poem, and will only add that to me it is most poignantly pathetic as the swan-song of a most remarkable man, and a dear friend. I cannot expect others to see in it all that I see, but even the harshest critic will discover in it more than crudity, and those who have stood beside the dying—and even the critic may have done this—will remember how the significant and wandering words spoken by dying lips have often had the sacredness of gospels—and, remembering, will murmur with me a reverent *Ave atque Vale.*

'There is nothing more to engross me in this world, and—the last tie being broken—it is time to think of quitting Babylon for ever.' Written by Petrarch in his copy of Virgil.

*Let us beside the river rest a while,
For now the last light lingers like God's smile,
And you and I, like two tired travellers,
Have come all soiled to Life's last dusty mile.*

*To this strange House of Life through doors of light
We enter in, and scarce have moved aright
When a Shape summons us from pleasant talk,
And we pass out again thro' doors of night.*

*All kings and lovers go the self-same road,
And know not if it lead to sleep or God ;
And after some few years a little dust
Alone is left, which the wind blows abroad.*

*Lo, I have seen great houses desolate,
And with loud moan the corpse borne out in state ;
Then, after some brief months, the Bride pass in
With light and laughter thro' the self-same gate.*

*And lo, it is the same bell rings for both ;
Laughter of bells for plighted wedding troth ;
And moan of bells when slow incurious hands
Lay on the dead man's face the funeral cloth.*

*Let us a little time with talk run on
Of things which we have seen, or hoped, or done ;
It is but little time we have, and still
A pleasant place is this great Babylon.*

*Warm hostelries it hath where we have slept,
Bright rooms where we our merry feasts have kept,
And we were loth to go, did we not think
Of, O, so many places where we wept!*

*The grass-blade springs, the bird is tossed along
Its skiey road of brightness and of song,
And neither knows from what warm Hand it sprang,
Or how the life was nourished and grew strong.*

*And since, like these, I know not whence I came,
It were in me small scorn or little shame
That I am loth to go : let Him decide
Who timed my coming and gave me my name.*

*Let us be still. And yet at times this thought
Perplexes me,—Why was I made and wrought
With so much skill of cunning workmanship,
Only to be cast down and brought to nought?*

*It were as tho' the Maker made a star,
Lit it, and for an hour bade it afar
Flash splendours forth : then struck it out, and cried,
'Go now, and lie where dark and dead things are!'*

*Or as a Schoolmaster, who takes a boy
And trains his mind in learning's eager joy,
Then, mocking cries, 'Perfect art thou in vain,
Be broken thou with Truth thy broken toy.'*

*O verily, verily, this is not God's way,
Not thus the Maker toils upon His clay ;
Be it He breaks us here, yet shall He not,
Think you, make us anew some other day ?*

*O verily, verily, this is not God's plan,
To spend eternities in making man,
And then for all His skill to end in nought,
To end at that same point where it began.*

*The meanest artist, with the feeblest glance
Into his Art's concealed significance,
Attains a method surer with the years ;
In God's Art only is there no advance ?*

*The greatest artist likewise feels the sense
Of Progress as a thing unfixed, immense,
And all his Art, a single wave that flows
Out of the Soul's unbounded opulence.*

*Can God then be content to contemplate
His work as finished, be it soon or late,
While one marred creature of His hand upbraids
And craves fresh chances in a better state ?*

*It cannot be the brain that soars sublime
Into the height and mysteries of Time,
Now is a pulp wherein corruption thrives,
Or on the fields a little leaven of lime.*

*Something survives that scorns corruption's bands,
Something that worked thro' us its high commands ;
There is a Spirit that moved behind the brain,
And somewhere there's a House not made with Hands*

*All that aspired at last shall find its mark :
See, how each morn the little eager lark
Throbs up the sky all hungry for the dawn,
And finds the punctual light beyond the Dark.*

*O Soul, be sure that this must be God's plan,
To warm the germ of God concealed in man,
Till it outsoar in scorn the ended flesh,
As seeds the husk in which their life began.*

*Thus by degrees, on secret promptings fed,
By sweet divine illusions charmed and led,
Man pushes on in search of earthly good,
Till, losing earth, he finds God's heaven instead.*

*Even as plants unveil a tiny eye,
Think the sun near, and strive to touch the sky ;
And straining upward, get their growth to find
Always there is a Higher above the High.*

*For hearts and brains that let Earth's prizes slip
Comes there at last no higher scholarship ?
A power commensurate with the Soul's demand ?
A loftier dialect to the poet's lip ?*

*All, all leads up to that we do not see,
Powers that shall ripen, worlds that yet shall be—
Time like a twilight swallowed up at last
In the broad radiance of eternity.*

*All is not buried in the great abyss,
Brains that stored truth, and Love that found its bliss
In death of self : O, God Himself is not
So rich to bear such shameful waste as this.*

*So, Friend, we part. Long while in Babylon
My feet on many a foolish quest have gone ;
Now Death cries, 'For a longer journey rise,
Nor put thy worn-out pilgrim sandals on.*